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OPEN SEASON

(Abridged)

"A Thriller"

—New York
Herald-Tribune

BERNARD THIELEN

BOB MCKNIGHT
OPEN SEASON
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ALL SET FOR THE MANHUNT SEASON

Until that urgent phone call from Washington, George Farrell was planning to spend that New England autumn week end hunting. But since the call was from his brother, a major in a super-secret government operation, George didn't ask questions. The major said to meet him in New York . . . and there George went.

But the major never showed up at the designated meeting place, and when George began poking around he turned up an incredible story. His brother had been kidnaped, in broad daylight, in New York City, by Communist AVH agents!

Then George knew there would be hunting that week end after all. Only this time the Farrell brothers were the quarry, and the Reds had declared a special kind of OPEN SEASON!

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second complete novel**

CAST OF CHARACTERS

George Farrell

This New Englander thought hunting was a fine sport—until he became the quarry.

Major Philip Farrell

Was he an American agent or a Twentieth Century turncoat?

Tisza Swann

She was the living definition of Hungarian cheesecake.

Istvan Szabo-Lewis

His Oxford accent belied a Freedom Fighter's stamina.

Niki Sviridov

A Moskovite of the old order, his bag of tricks was anything but amusing.

Michael Swann

To win the respect of his countrymen, he would sacrifice even his life.

OPEN SEASON

by
BERNARD THIELEN

Abridged

ACE BOOKS, INC.
23 West 47th Street, New York 36, N. Y.

OPEN SEASON

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A SLICE OF DEATH

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Printed in U.S.A.

CHAPTER ONE

WITH SOME uneasiness, one Monday morning in early October, George Farrell read the note on his desk after he came back from a coffee break at Lou's restaurant. It said:

Call Maj. Farrel—Liberty 5-6700, Wash DC, ext. 735686.

"Anything wrong?" he asked Philip when the connection was made.

His brother's tone, as usual, was firm but noncommittal. "No . . . Family's fine. I'd like to see you, Georgie."

"Sure, Phil. Good idea. Why don't you and Ann put Junior in the back seat and drive up? The foliage colors are right at the peak. And bring your shotgun."

"I'm not thinking about a vacation. And this has got to be right away. Can you meet me in New York this afternoon?"

George hesitated. His reaction was entirely negative. He disliked changes in routine that were not of his making. "Well, I was going bird-hunting first thing in the morning. Anyway, Monday's always a bad day here—news is usually scarce. No, I don't think—"

"This is a top-priority job, George. Highly classified."

"Now you're making noises like Pentagon brass in the Steve Canyon strip. What's the deal, Major?"

"Can't tell you now, Georgie. Don't push me."

"Hell, you can't expect me to drop everything and go down there with no more of a lead than you've given me."

The line was silent momentarily. Then Philip said, "Do you know Colonel Thompson, the PMS and T at Darmouth? He could tell you something about it. Maybe it would be a good thing if you talked to him for a few minutes before you come down. Then you could be thinking about your part in this

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thing. Thompson doesn't know the whole story, but he can sort of set up the pins for you. I'll call him and clear you."

"Phil, I didn't say I could come. I'd have to—"

"Now about meeting you in New York," Philip went on. "What hotel do you usually stop at? I'll leave a message at the desk."

Reluctantly, George yielded to the pressure in his brother's tone of command. "Well, all right. I suppose you know what you're doing, even if I don't. I usually stay with—friends, but I like the Plaza fine, on an expense account."

"It'll be straight per diem, and not very lush. But make it the Plaza. That will be very convenient, as a matter of fact."

"You know, Major, the least I'm expecting is a mission to Istanbul. And I didn't even know you were in G-2."

"I'm not," Philip said shortly. "I can't tell you any more now, but talk to Colonel Thompson if you get a chance. And be at the Plaza by 1800 hours, will you? See you then, Georgie." The receiver clicked.

George hung up with a strong feeling of irritation, and turned to frown out the window. Even his tour with the Sixth Army's Alamo Scouts in the jungles of New Guinea and the Philippines, as a very young man, had failed to put any military stamp on him. After the war he had entered Dartmouth under the G.I. Bill. He had liked working on *The Dartmouth*, and since he had come to have a fondness for the New Hampshire countryside around Hanover, at his graduation he was glad of the chance to take a job on a new semi-rural newspaper that was just getting established in the college town.

Eight years later, when most of the original staff of bright young men had drifted away to Boston or New York, he found himself editor of the paper and a junior partner in its publishing company.

Occasionally, but less and less often as the pleasant years passed, he felt that he should be doing something more important than running a small-town newspaper which no one

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except the staff took very seriously. Yet on the whole, he was not dissatisfied. He had made a good many friends throughout the Connecticut Valley, and a few interesting enemies. He could—and often did—fly to New York for a week end of fun.

Altogether he was more content than most men he knew; he had not married, was still far short of thirty-five; he liked his work, enjoyed the changing of the New England seasons, and generally was quietly happy.

And then Phil had to pull rank and haul him down to New York City . . .

According to the airline schedule, he could take a flight after lunch and get into New York in time to settle in his hotel before six o'clock. He had a desk full of work to clean up, but he was getting nowhere with his work. Bill Spurgis, the managing editor, came in to talk to him, but George did most of the talking.

"You'll have to take over for a couple of days, Bill," he said, "starting right now." He stood up and got his coat. "The Pentagon is dealing me in on something big—I think."

George walked out to the parking lot and, with a momentary lift of his spirits, got behind the wheel of his white Corvette, currently his most precious plaything; he had traded in an English sports car after being creamed by a Ford pickup in a fast start from a changing light. He swung onto the street. It was a typical October day, lit with rich and mellow sunshine. If Phil had been less mysterious, he thought, he would enjoy driving down to New York.

He lived outside of town in a white farmhouse with a red barn that managed at all times of year to look like an Ektachrome cover on *New Hampshire Profiles*.

Within ten minutes he pulled up beside his own back door. In the dining room he made himself a pre-lunch drink, which he usually passed up on business days, and allowed Mrs. Perley, his old housekeeper, competent, devoted and discreet, to sell him steak and apple pie. Mrs. Perley had never been fully convinced that the noon meal was not dinner. After

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packing his bag he drove back to town, stopping at the Gulf station to arrange with Joe about picking up the Corvette at Lebanon Airport. Joe would give it a grease job, antifreeze, and so on, and leave it at the farm. Then he dropped in at the Army ROTC office, and was annoyed when the sergeant told him that Colonel Thompson had driven to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, that morning. He was probably on his way back to Hanover, since he couldn't be reached by phone.

At Lebanon Airport, George settled himself for a more than ordinarily boring flight to New York in the old DC-3. His mood deteriorated again, thinking of the many Friday-afternoon flights he had taken to the city during the past two years. Pleasures of anticipation had always shortened those trips, thinking about the shows he wanted to see or where to take Patsy for dinner. Usually, of course, his plans went down in flames after he arrived at Patsy's apartment. People would be coming in, or a party needed going to, and things went on from there. It was good fun, usually, but he had long ago decided that once a month was about enough. His deeper satisfaction, he told himself, came from his own New England countryside. He liked the slow pace of life—having a big garden, getting in the wood, hunting in season, and winters full of long, leisurely talk with farmers, loggers, storekeepers, priests, and politicians.

This business of Phil's, though—he didn't like that. Well, whatever Phil's proposition was, he could always say no, but the insidious questions kept intruding. What the hell did his brother want, anyway? Why couldn't he talk about it on the telephone? Why the six o'clock deadline? He had a feeling that it would not be an amiable meeting.

When at last one wing tip pointed down at Long Island as the ancient aircraft banked clumsily for its approach, George could not shake off a strong uneasiness which had bothered him since he read the memo to call Washington . . . He wondered if he would have time later to call Patsy.

While the limousine from La Guardia crawled through the neon-lighted streets among the crowds headed for home,

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he began to sense, as he always did in New York, a certain speeding up in the tempo of his mental reactions and a readiness to make more spontaneous decisions. New York, he told himself, hits a country boy like a stiff drink. For the first time, he began to look forward with some interest to whatever Phil had for him. He hoped that the job would have nothing to do with Hanover or the newspaper. With a decent excuse, he would be prepared to travel almost anywhere.

CHAPTER TWO

WHEN he registered at the Plaza the buzz of cocktail-time conversation was already at high pitch. The desk clerk handed him the expected message. It was an unsigned request that he come as soon as convenient to the apartment of Mr. Michael Swan at an address on East Sixty-fourth Street. George looked at his watch—a little before six—and decided to walk there without bothering to go to his room. He sent his bag up and started up Fifth Avenue. In the lobby of the building the switchboard operator told him he was expected; he could go up at once. Everything was progressing smoothly. But the young woman who opened the apartment door seemed deeply perturbed. She put on a quick, friendly smile, however, looking directly at George Farrell.

"Will you come in? I am Elizabeth Swan." She had an accent, not quite identifiable, but her voice was warm and pleasant. Her features, George thought, were—well, exotic. She had delicately hollowed cheeks and dark-lidded green eyes. She resembled what the French call *tigre* in an Asiatic girl, but Miss Swan was very fair, with rather high color. He noted her athletic poise, like a professional dancer's, as she guided him to the living room and established him in an arm-chair. She put cognac and cigarettes at his elbow.

"I had expected to meet my brother here, Miss Swan," George said, after a decent interval.

"I know. I also have been thinking Philip would come, together with my father." She frowned and ran her tongue quickly over her lips. "I have been speaking—it is some hours since—through telephone to my father by the Washington Airport. Philip and he were in point to embark. He give me the flight's number. They would arrive by Idlewild at three hours. He ask that I send a message for you by the Hotel Plaza."

"The flight must have been delayed," George said easily. But he reflected that it was unlikely; flying conditions had

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been perfect all day. "If I can use your telephone, I'll check with the airline."

"I have already done." Her face was solemn. "The flight is arriving at three hours. They are in the list of travelers."

George felt a twinge of concern, but it was necessary to reassure the girl. "It's quite a run into town from Idlewild," he said. "Heavy traffic—some difficulty with the bus—"

"This is to be hoped, Mr. Farrell."

George could think of nothing more to say. Calling the police would certainly be premature. No good going out to Idlewild now, but he felt he ought to do something swift and competent. The brandy was warm in his stomach; the girl, troubled and beautiful. He tried the Manhattan air terminal. After being courteously passed around the switchboard for fifteen minutes, he finally learned from the limousine dispatcher that no delays had been reported on the afternoon runs. Of course Philip and Swan could have taken a taxi, or perhaps had been met by an Army sedan. He called the First Army motor pool at Fort Jay. No trip ticket had been made out for Idlewild or in the name of Major Farrell. Unable to think of anything else, he stalled for time.

"Let's give them another hour," he told the girl. He was not at all sure what he would do then; probably call the police. "Meanwhile, maybe we could have a quick dinner together somewhere. We could step over to the Rendezvous at the Plaza."

Miss Swan shook her head impatiently. "I am remaining by this telephone." Then she smiled—the quick smile that could light her face in an instant. "But of course—you are hungry. If you would stay by us, I could attempt to prepare a little supper."

George started to protest, then decided it might be just as well if she had something to occupy her. "Let me help," he said, and followed her into the small kitchen.

She opened the refrigerator and peered in uncertainly. "For my father," she said, "it would be a little *szalonna*—such uncooked bacon with paprika." She looked up at him with

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a faint grin. "I think it would not be interesting to you. Philip is at all times preferring ham with eggs."

"Nothing wrong with that," George said. "I can cook it, if you like."

"Would you be so kind? Truthfully, I am not skilled with cooking. We go mostly by the restaurant. And you will not like my coffee." Ruefully she showed him a jar of black powder. "I shame myself, Mr. Farrell." She put some of the powder in an espresso machine.

George had fried the ham to a steady brown. He poured off the fat, added a little butter, and broke eggs neatly into the pan. "Name's George. Kitchen's no place for formality, is it?"

"I am Erzsébet—in English, Elizabeth. But always I am called Tisza."

"German?"

"We are Hungarian. I am thinking previously that you knew this from Philip. In Hungary we are not Swan, but Hattyu, which is the same word in our language. We are in America almost two years. With help from Philip we are coming out."

George knew that his brother had been attached to the Legation in Budapest during the revolution. A very short tour, as he remembered. Philip had never said much to him about it, but George had read John MacCormac's story in *The New York Times*. The Kadar regime, obviously at Russian insistence, had given Major Farrell twenty-four hours to get out of Hungary. Philip had been charged with aiding the rebels. Good for him if he had, George thought. Not many American officials could be accused of that.

While they were eating at the kitchen table, Tisza told him something of their dark journey across the Austrian border, stops at Vienna and Munich, then—with Philip's help—Camp Kilmer and a new start in the States. Her recital was curiously unemotional, and she seemed careful to avoid anything which might arouse sympathy. Afterward, as they had their coffee in the living room, Tisza looked at the mantel clock.

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"Well, George." She smiled faintly. "Your hour of grace have passed. What is it we are doing now?"

George had been thinking about that. "I suppose we'd better call the—" He broke off. The word on his tongue might have unhappy connotations for this refugee girl.

"Police? I think it is better not." Her tone was calm and matter-of-fact; her expression was thoughtful rather than worried.

He decided to lay it on the line. "You see, the police will know about it if your father and Philip have been in a smash-up and admitted to a hospital."

"It is better if the police are not informed," she said again.

George realized that he was getting irritated. If Tisza had recoiled from his proposal with a touch of hysteria, he was prepared to be tactful and sympathetic. But she was ruling out the police as casually as she might say she did not care for a Martini.

"Look here, Tisza," he said. "Philip is my brother. He's got a family in Washington. His wife is probably waiting for a phone call right now, just as we are. If anything has happened to him, I've got the responsibility—for one thing—of telling Ann about it."

"Please do not imagine that I am unconcerned." This time her voice shook a little. "It is agreed that we must do all possible to find your brother and my father. This is important. But it is yet more important that the police are not discovering—certain affairs of business. You must believe me, George; Philip would not have you calling the police."

"You'd better put me in the picture, Tisza," George said. He could not tell whether he was angry or just a little scared. He knew he was puzzled—had been, all day. And Philip's disappearance had brought his feeling of frustration close to the boiling point.

"I have little knowledge of this present affair," the girl said. "Only that Philip was wishing to see my father at Washington. Relating to the connection which my father have with Philip, I can perhaps make some of the picture, as you say."

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But please, George—first let us think what is to be done that they may be discovered."

"Well, from what I gather—it sounds like a natural for the FBI." He could not keep a touch of sarcasm from his voice, and he stood up impatiently. "Don't bother to protect my innocence; I know about spies. I've read the paper-backs with beautiful dolls like you on the cover and men in trench coats. Nobody knows whose side anybody in on till the last chapter. Maybe you and your father—and Philip too, for all I know—are in what is referred to as 'the business.' You used the word. But I'm just a country boy whose brother has been missing for almost five hours. I want to find out if he's been cracked up in traffic. So I call the police. Anything wrong with that?"

Her nostrils tightened, but there was a curious half-smile on her lips. "Please, Mr. Farrell," she said. "It is no help if you are being angry with me. I must tell what I am fearing have happen. I have to say that Father and Philip have possibly been—interrupted. Perhaps you understand better kidnaped."

"You're taking it pretty calmly."

"It appears to me that such calm discussion is necessary."

A little ashamed of his outburst, George reconsidered his position. Tisza's quiet manner, together with the peculiar tone of Philip's call that morning, made her mention of kidnaping entirely credible.

"Have you any idea who would want to snatch either of them?" he asked her.

"The Communists, of course. But it is not sure that they are kidnaped. I yet have hope that they discover they are followed. In such case they would not come directly here."

"But, my God, all they'd have to do is yell for the nearest—"

With her slight smile she supplied the word again. "Police? Are you giving assurance that the police act always in confidence?" It was not really a question. "Believe me, George—anything by the newspapers would be—most unfortunate."

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"Well, I don't know that it would necessarily get in the papers—" he began without conviction.

"I think perhaps you have reason concerning the FBI," Tisza was saying, "but I feel I am not best to decide. Will you permit that I call a friend? He should now be home from his work, and he have experience in these matters."

George nodded. "Can't do any harm. I'm afraid I'm no help to you in anything like this."

She picked up the telephone and spoke briefly in a language entirely strange to George—Hungarian, he supposed. Still holding the instrument, she smiled quickly at him and explained that the switchboard operator had also come from Budapest. Then her party answered, and she was speaking again with a sort of intensity that could be emotion or merely the pattern of the idiom. The conversation was short, but she put down the instrument with an air of something accomplished.

"Istvan Szabo-Lewis," she said. "He is close associate from my father. The flat from him is one floor above us. He comes to us at once, and you will be happy that he is speaking English more better than I. He have lived long in England."

As if on cue, the door buzzer sounded, and Tisza admitted a dark, well-tailored man of about George's age. He had a mustache and white teeth. To George, he looked very Hungarian indeed—like a lieutenant of hussars in a Molnar play. The introduction was made.

"If you pardon me," Tisza said to George, "I am explaining to Istvan in Hungarian." Although the explanation took several minutes, Szabo-Lewis did not interrupt. George caught only a few of Tisza's words: *Washington, Farrell, Eastern Air Lines*. He also heard *communiste*, as in French, several times. Then Szabo-Lewis turned to him and spoke in English, with a marked British accent.

"You and I might just have a go at Idlewild, Farrell. A chance we'd find a clue at the cab rank or the airline desk. I think Elizabeth should stand by the telephone here. And I

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quite agree, if we draw blank at Idlewild, we might well have a chat with the Bureau."

George felt a little chagrined that this foreigner was calling the plays on what George considered to be his own home ground. But after all, he told himself, he didn't know the score. He didn't know the names of all the players. He wasn't even sure he knew what league he was playing in.

Down in the apartment-house garage they got into an inconspicuous little four-seater. George, as a sports-car connoisseur, recognized it appreciatively as a Lancia, a make rare in America. Szabo-Lewis whipped the car up onto the street expertly and was rolling down the East River Drive toward the Queensboro Bridge before George could phrase a useful question. It was the Hungarian, in fact, who spoke first.

"I am not a professional spy, Farrell—if that's what you're thinking. What you find yourself mixed up in is actually quite a simple show, at least in broad terms. Tisza has asked me to clue you."

"You'd better start at the beginning."

"Quite. Perhaps if I just refresh your memory a bit on the October revolution of 1956 you'll be able to fill in most of the picture for yourself."

George grunted non-committally. He had followed the Hungarian uprising with more than casual interest. Philip was over there, for one thing—and like many Americans George had been a little ashamed of his country's ineffectual role.

Szabo-Lewis went on: "As you probably know, most of the so-called freedom fighters were Communists. At least they were registered Party members—students, intellectuals, factory workers. But there were a few good chaps who had managed for years to stay outside the Party and still stay alive. Many of them were members of the old aristocracy, and at first the Reds hadn't bothered them much. By denying them any sort of job, the Russians expected to starve them either into the Party or out of the country. But they serabbled along, keeping out of sight, often with the help of peasants from their former estates. Sometimes they were aided secretly—and

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unofficially, you understand—by members of the British and American Legations. The military attaché staffs were particularly interested in them, because they tried to repay kindness—and of course serve their own convictions—by supplying information about Russian Army strength and activities. But it was hardly a pleasant way of life for them.”

“How long did you go on like that?” George said. “About ten years, wasn’t it?”

Szabo-Lewis gave a short, deprecating laugh. “You understand, old man, I’m really not including myself. Matter of fact, I was in England for five of the worst years. When I went back home, of course, I naturally got involved.” He was silent for some moments, focusing on his driving. Then he spoke again. “I said we aren’t professionals. By that I mean that we haven’t had formal training in espionage and sabotage like your CIA chaps, or the British MI-5, or—especially—the lads from Moscow. But I suppose we became fairly competent through experience—those of us who survived—as civilians finally become soldiers after a good bit of combat.”

George cleared his throat. “That kind of war is rough, all right. And you got a lousy deal when the United Nations let the Russians clobber you. But I don’t see why you people seem to be carrying on with your operation here in the United States. And what’s my brother Philip got to do with all this?”

“Well, taking your question about Philip first—I don’t know, really. It would be impertinent of me to ask him, wouldn’t it? Though not of you to ask me, of course,” he added quickly, glancing sideways at George. “You and I can speculate, among friends, that he is in ‘the business.’ I suppose his military position—certainly it’s legitimate—is also his cover. I should guess—guess, mark you—that he’s with CIA rather than military intelligence or FBI. The reason I say so is that in his contacts with us he seems to be more concerned with developments abroad—and we have certain channels in such matters—than in the domestic situation which is our particular dish of tea.” Szabo-Lewis chuckled. “Now, old boy,

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you can see that I'm not a pro. I've talked altogether too bloody much. But in going on like this, perhaps I've answered your first question, too."

"Not exactly," George said. "You mention the domestic situation. I suppose you're talking about subversives. I'd guess that you're working on the Communists among the Hungarian refugees—maybe for the FBI."

"You've got the broad form. But ours is by no means a recognized FBI operation. It's all on our own initiative. We collect our information and pass it on. We aren't told what the Bureau does about it. And I ought to spell out what we mean by 'Communists.' You see, Farrell, most of the poor devils who came to America after the collapse of the revolution had belonged to the Party—that was essential, of course, to hold a job or go to a university. We're not interested in these belly Communists. But the Soviets planted quite a number of AVH types—security police, you know—among the refugees. And they haven't exactly been asleep. They've already put the finger on quite a lot of the ex-freedom fighters, the ones who were really active. I understand you're a journalist, Farrell, but I assure you there have been a number of disappearances in this country that your wire services didn't carry."

Now that he knew more of the specific basis for Tisza's fears, George felt a slow chill creeping over him. He began to understand as reality, not merely an abstract idea, the unforgiving ruthlessness of Red vengeance. The Soviets, he now realized, had never closed the book on the Hungarian revolution as the West apparently had done. Those who had fought for their country's freedom and escaped with their lives were finding something less than peace and security on the streets of American cities. In a very few hours, George had come a long way from the cloisters of Hanover, with their conferences and panels and symposia on the need for sweetness and light in relations with the Soviet Union. He could not recall much academic discussion of terror as an in-

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strument of Soviet policy. Now a long-forgotten but sharply familiar taste was in his mouth—the same bilious acidity as when he had dropped into a rubber boat, with face and hands blackened, to paddle silently into the darkness toward a shore line held by an unseen enemy.

CHAPTER THREE

WHEN they came in on the well-lighted activity of the new Idlewild terminal, George felt some of his self-assurance returning. The place had a look of organized competence. There was equipment for any contingency. This, he thought, was still the United States. It was neither a dark, Jap-held island nor a captive country behind the Iron Curtain. This nation had powerful agencies which could surely protect American citizens—and refugees in America—when it came to a situation like this. There was Philip's own group, whoever they were. Ann would probably know that. He decided suddenly that he was being naive to string along with a pitiful and ineffective little clique of exiles. Time was being wasted. He stopped by the main telephone counter and put his hand on Szabo-Lewis' arm.

"Look, Stephen," he said—they had got to first names on the Van Wyck Expressway—"suppose we do uncover a lead here. Or suppose we don't. What the hell can you and I do about it? As far as my brother is concerned, I think I've played cops and robbers too long already. You do what you want to about Swan, but I'm calling Washington as of now to report Phil's disappearance."

Szabo-Lewis stared at him for a moment. Then he said, "Quite. But do have a care about how you place that call, old boy. I suppose you know we're being watched."

George hesitated. He glanced around uncertainly. But he shrugged and moved toward the counter. Stephen held him for a moment.

"I think this will work out," he said. "There seems to be only one chap tailing us—funny little man in a cap and leather jacket, like a cab driver. Chances are he'll stay with you. He'll hope to overhear something. See that he doesn't, won't you. That will give me time to have a go at the—what do you call it?—taxi line. I'll meet you here."

George nodded and turned to speak to the nearest tele-

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phone attendant. Stephen wandered casually away. The man in the leather windbreaker bellied up beside George and gave the girl a number in Cleveland. His accent was heavy.

"I'm sorry, sir," the girl told him. "This gentleman was ahead of you. I'll be with you in just a moment."

"That's all right," George said. "I've forgotten my number. I'll look it up." The girl handed him a memo form. He went over to the rack and found the Washington book. On the form he wrote Philip's Chevy Chase number and scrawled below it:

Operator—Please keep this call confidential, especially from the guy in the black windbreaker.

He folded the paper once, moved quietly to the counter well away from Windbreaker, and passed the slip to the attendant. She glanced at it and looked sharply at him. Her eyes were intelligent. In a few moments she told Windbreaker to take his Cleveland call in Booth 14. As soon as he padded off she caught George's eyes, motioning with her chin to a remote alcove.

Ann sounded surprised to hear his voice—and tense, which was not like her. "I thought of course it would be Philip," she said. "Are you with him, George? Is he all right?"

"We missed connections somehow," he told her. "I was going to meet him in town, but he hasn't shown yet. I thought you might have heard from him."

"Well, no, I haven't. And I did expect a call before this. I knew he had a long layover at Idlewild."

"Layover? You mean before flying back to Washington?"

"Oh, no. He was to take the Clipper for Paris at midnight. What I imagine happened is that he had a chance to catch an earlier flight. One of those things, you know, where they meet you as you get off one plane and tell you there's another waiting to take off." There was an unconvincing note in Ann's voice, but her theory was just plausible enough to make him hesitate. Of course there were plenty of holes in it. What about Swan? How about Phil's insistence on the meeting? And the guy in the windbreaker? He could check out Ann's idea in the Pan American building. Meanwhile, maybe it would be

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better not to alarm her unnecessarily. But still he had to prepare her for possible bad news later.

"Ann," he said, "can you tell me anything about this trip of Phil's? He wanted to meet me in New York, as I say, and I think it had something to do with his—activities. I'm pretty much in the dark about what he wanted, but I got the impression he thought the meeting was important. Could you put me in touch with his boss?"

Her voice became much less artificial. She sounded like Ann again. "Oh, Georgie—I *am* worried. There's something very hush about Phil's business, but I don't know what it is. He's supposed to be with Joint War Plans in G-3, but I can never seem to reach him at the Pentagon. He makes these trips and I'm not allowed to ask questions or even act mysterious. Jack Oliphant is the chief of JWP, but I called Jack and he doesn't—"

George heard a muffled sob and started to speak, but she interrupted. Her voice was under fair control. "George, Philip did give me a telephone number, but I can't pass it on to anybody. He made that very clear. I was to call it personally if—if—" She broke a little on the next word.

"Take it easy, Ann," George told her. "We really haven't anything much to go on yet. There couldn't have been any—funny business here at the airport in the middle of the afternoon. I'll look into things here. As you say, he may be on an earlier flight to Paris. I'll call you back on that."

There was a pause. Ann's voice, when it came through, was lifeless. "I don't really think he's on an earlier flight, Georgie. I asked a friend of ours in MATS to look up the schedule for me. No afternoon take-off for Paris today. I was just waiting until midnight, on the chance that he was tied up with somebody in New York and couldn't get to a telephone. I was waiting until the scheduled departure time of his flight. If he wasn't on it, I was going to call that number he gave me."

There wasn't much for George to say after that. "Don't worry any more than you have to. Probably there's a simple

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explanation." He said it without much conviction. "We'll follow through at this end. I've got some friends of Phil's with me here. Go ahead and call that number, Ann. Tell them I'm on this thing already—with Istvan Szabo-Lewis and Erzsébet Swan. Got those names? They might mean something to Phil's people. I have a room at the Plaza. Or they can call me at Michael Swan's apartment. I don't have—"

"I know Tisza." Her voice came through weakly. "I have her telephone number. Thank you, Georgie, and God—" The line went dead.

Stephen came up to him as he was paying for his call. "We've had a bit of luck." He spoke calmly, but George caught the suppressed excitement. "The cab starter saw the snatch."

"Snatch? God! You mean they were kidnaped here at International Airport in broad daylight?"

"That's what it amounted to, old boy. Nothing rough, of course. I take it that they didn't even know the snatch was on." Stephen moved George away from the counter and they kept their voices low.

"Cab starter's a chap named Kopacs—his parents came from Szekesfehervar. He knows the language; that's how he chanced to remember Michael and Philip. It had to be Michael and Philip; descriptions tally perfectly." Stephen's eyes were bright, and his hussar mustache twitched like a rabbit's whiskers.

"For heaven's sake, what happened?"

"Well, about three o'clock they were standing near the cab rank with their luggage, waiting for the limousine to New York. Big, well-dressed chap came up to them and spoke to Michael in Hungarian: '*Szervusz, Mihai-baci,*' and so forth—very matey. Michael knew him well, it seems. They shook hands for a long time, the way Hungarians do. Big chap said he had a car and would run Michael and his friend into town, they could talk on the way. Pretty soon a mammoth black Cadillac rolled up, the kind you see at funerals, Kopacs says. Three men already inside, including uniformed

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chauffeur. Michael, Philip, and the big chap piled in. Kopacs was mildly interested, of course, on account of the language business. He even noticed the license plate. New Hampshire. Began with G."

"Grafton County," George said. "That's where I live—Hanover."

Stephen's birdlike eyes fixed on him sharply. "And Dartmouth College? How far from Woodstock, Vermont? Not far, I know. George, we've got a red rose in our teeth. My chaps are already on to something up there. They think there's a nest of them—AVH types—near Woodstock. One of my chaps—student at Dartmouth—picked up the lead." He clapped George hard on the back. "Tally-ho! We'll run the beggars to earth. Let's get cracking." He started for the exit.

"Wait a minute, Stephen; wait a minute." George was trying to pull a dozen new facts into line. "I've talked to Ann, Phil's wife," George went on. "She's calling his boss, whoever he is. We've got to clue them in. And there's Tisza. And our friend in the windbreaker—he's watching us pretty openly, right now. We'll have to think this through a little bit."

"But the scent is getting no warmer, George."

"Look here, Stephen. There are at least three main routes from New York to my part of New Hampshire, with half a dozen reasonable variations. Up there we argue by the hour which one is the best. And the Cadillac"—he glanced at his watch—"has almost seven hours start on us. Hell, they could be there by now, if they pressed hard. Anyway, how do we know they aren't still right here in New York?"

"You're absolutely right, of course," Stephen said, after a pause. "I'm much too impulsive. Perhaps that's why chaps called me the Mad Magyar at Oxford. Let's take first things first, then. We'll manage to lose our uncultured friend here—that shouldn't be too hard. Once we're in the clear, you can telephone Philip's wife and pass this latest thing on to her. Then we stop off at Michael's flat and await word from our betters in Washington. Sound all right?"

"I think so. Just one thing—did you take care of your man

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Kopacs? We don't want Windbreaker to find out how much we know, do we?"

"Basic, old boy," Stephen said. "I told Kopacs a rude story in Hungarian—very funny—and also gave him five bucks. I don't think we've any bits and pieces left over."

But later, George realized that he had forgotten something . . .

They got back to the apartment about midnight, having stopped enroute to call Ann again. While Tisza tended the espresso machine, the three of them talked it out. But no call came in from Washington. The Government boys figured they could get along without amateur assistance, George reflected. He didn't blame them too much. George checked mentally his own estimate of the situation, and finally concluded that going to New Hampshire rather than staying in New York—what could they do here?—would offer the best chance to track Philip and Swan; the fact that the Cadillac carried New Hampshire plates, and Stephen's lead that the AVH hideout was not far from Hanover seemed to be the deciding factors. Also he wanted to see what information Colonel Thompson could supply.

Assuming that the kidnapers were AVH agents, it seemed more likely that they'd want Swan rather than Philip; probably they wanted to get information on the Hungarian refugees' anti-Communist activities, rather than murder for revenge. But two questions bothered George at this point:

First, did the kidnapers know who Philip was? Were they after him for any specific reason, or did they take him only as a necessity of the moment? Second, if Michael knew the big fellow, why did he seem to go with him so willingly?

While George was mulling over these questions, Stephen suddenly stood up. "Well, chaps," he said, "I'm for New Hampshire. Who's with me?"

"I am," George said, and got slowly to his feet. "I can put you up at my place."

Tisza shut off the hissing coffee machine. "I can do nothing here," she said. "May I go with?"

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George looked at her and smiled. He found himself definitely pleased with the prospect. "If I'm going into the business," he said, "I can't imagine anybody I'd rather have in the firm with me."

"Um—yes," Stephen said. "Quite."

Their preparations took a few minutes. While Stephen dashed upstairs to pack a bag, Tisza disappeared into her bedroom and George gave Ann another call. She had nothing new to offer. Whoever had taken her report of Phil's disappearance had been sympathetic but noncommittal. It had been a man's voice that had asked her a few questions, then informed her that everything possible would be done. She said she was all right now; and George gave her his home and office telephone numbers, tried ineffectually to think of something reassuring.

When he hung up, he felt rarely touched emotions becoming involved. Until this moment he had been carried along mostly on the initiative of others. Now he found himself possessed by a not entirely intellectual determination to find his brother in spite of hell and the Communist conspiracy. Yes, and regardless of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which seemed to be taking this whole thing pretty casually.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOURS later, George pointed the Lancia into the rising sun as they left New York 22 at Hoosick and turned toward Bennington, Vermont. Tisza dozed in the bucket seat beside him, her head resting lightly on his shoulder. Stephen was curled up in back with the luggage; he had driven the first stretch out of New York City. George held the speed down, trying to hoard the few pints of gasoline remaining in the tank. They had not been able to find a service station open but with a little luck and careful driving, he thought, they could make Bennington.

At under forty miles an hour he could at least enjoy the brilliant fall scenery. He had often told himself that October, as much as anything, held him bound to the northern New England country which had been stranded by the flood of progress. The scarlet sumac flash, the Indian smell of the leafy back roads, the bowstring whistle of a flushing woodcock—these things were so deeply satisfying to him that he could not imagine calling a place home that was too remote from them.

And that, he decided, was why he had never done anything serious about Patsy Dolan.

He and Patsy were tremendously fond of each other, and they had had a lot of fun together. That, he thought wryly, was what a guy always said about a girl he had no intention of marrying. But if he could picture Patsy Dolan away from New York it would have to be in some place like Miami Beach or Las Vegas, where she could follow every allusion in the talk around her. She always laughed when George suggested a week end at his place and she always came back with a schedule of the things they could do in town. And so they had drifted along for almost two years . . .

As they approached the outskirts of Old Bennington, they passed a motel on George's side. He casually noticed a car

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warming up in the court yard, trunk open and vapor clouds rising from dual exhaust ports. He stiffened at the wheel when his mind registered two facts: it was a black Cadillac and it carried New Hampshire plates. He drove on a few hundred yards, then back into a side road and cut the engine. Stephen was awake at once, and George broke the news.

"Of course it could just as well belong to some fat politician from Nashua," he said. "When you stop to think about it, it doesn't seem likely that our boys would take time out for a night's rest at a Bennington motel."

"Anything's possible," Stephen said. "They have no reason to hurry. If they pass here we'll have a look. If they go the other way, toward New York, they wouldn't be our chaps anyway."

"There's just one thing," George said. "I don't think we have more than a cup of gas left. We can't tail them. We'll have to fill up at the first station, and that will take a little time—enough to lose them."

"Don't let that bother you, George. There are mountains ahead, aren't there? These Lancia jobs are born and bred in the Alps. We can give those beggars ten minutes' start and spit in their eyes within an hour."

George shook his head. "Isn't that simple. We might lose them for good in the next couple of miles. You see, they have their choice of two routes from Bennington: straight over the mountains on the Molly Stark Trail, then up the Connecticut River to Hanover—if that's where they're going. Or, they can head north about twenty miles on U.S. Seven before going over the hump at Big Bromley. They could even stay on Seven to Rutland, in case they're pointed for Woodstock. We'll simply have to make a blind guess."

"Well," Stephen said, "let's not waste the time we have in hand. We can watch the road as well from that petrol pump ahead."

The attendant was still fumbling with the unfamiliar tank cap when the black Cadillac shot past. George caught a glimpse of Philip's back; he was sitting calmly in the front

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seat, half turned toward the uniformed chauffeur. An older man, whom Stephen said was Michael, was also in front, next to the window. Three others sat in back. George had a quick impression that one of them wore a black Homburg and was very big.

Tisza who had visited the rest room, returned to the car looking fresh and beautiful in her gray wool suit, like a girl headed for an Ivy League football game. Stephen had moved behind the wheel. George waited impatiently as the pump whirred, watching the register, fingering his billfold and some coins in order to have the exact change ready. He had made up his mind to go north on U.S. 7 from Bennington. If that was the wrong guess they might still have a chance. On a sunny October day like this the other route would be crowded with foliage viewers—elderly drivers, most of them. By making very fast time on Seven and over the mountains, Stephen could turn south on U.S. 5 when they reached the Vermont-New Hampshire border and maybe meet the Cadillac coming north from Bellows Falls, if that was the route the others had chosen.

That was in fact about what happened, although George realized afterward what a near thing it was. Through the mountains Stephen handled the little car with rather spectacular expertness. But they did not sight their quarry. By the time they reached the Connecticut River and turned south on Five, George was sure that the others had chosen the Molly Stark route. The big car could not possibly have stayed ahead of the Lancia up to Big Bromley and over the mountains.

But the Cadillac had not been standing still. In Bellows Falls, fifteen minutes later, George spotted it down the block, headed toward them and waiting for a traffic light. He warned Stephen, who immediately nosed into a parking space. When the light changed, the Cadillac unexpectedly swung right toward the bridge which crossed into New Hampshire. Stephen was out of the parking space and had turned toward the bridge before the light changed to red.

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"Thirty seconds later we'd have missed them," he said. "Where are they headed now, old boy?"

"They can still go on to Hanover. Definitely not the usual route, though. They'd have done much better on the Vermont side, on Five, for another fifty miles."

North through Charlestown, they kept the other car barely in sight, and when the big sedan bore east toward Claremont, George cursed.

"That just about rules out Hanover," he said. "Now they've got the whole White Mountains ahead of them—or the lake country, which is probably worse. We'll have to close up in Claremont. The traffic pattern is insane, and they'll have half a dozen route choices."

In Claremont they took the mad, dangerous swing around the town square, which George knew well from unhappy experience. Stephen, however, was laughing softly. "It's exactly like the Etoile," he said, "except that in Paris the tempo is faster."

Still close to the Cadillac's high-finned tail, they swung up a hill into a maze of two-way traffic which was fighting it out on a street where parked cars narrowed the passage to a single lane. Then they were suddenly in open country again—down-at-the-heels country, with rusting trailers parked among blighted pine trees. The road still ran generally north.

"God knows where they're headed now," George said. "This road doesn't really go anywhere. Watch for potholes, Stephen; they're like bomb craters."

"Any towns at all?"

"Two small villages—Cornish Flat and Meriden. Then the road cuts back to Lebanon and Hanover. But nobody in his right mind would go to Hanover this way."

"What about connecting roads?"

"Nothing worth considering. You can see, we're in a sort of valley, with pretty rugged terrain on both sides. Those mountains to the east are practically uninhabited—only a jeep could cross them."

Then Stephen had to concentrate on the car ahead. Often

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it disappeared over a hill or around a curve, and George was uneasy until they had it in sight again. Twelve miles north of Claremont they hit another level stretch, with a large athletic field on their left. Almost half a mile ahead they saw the Cadillac turn left off the main road. They saw it start up a very steep hill which was dotted with houses of red brick and white clapboard against a tapestry of fall colors.

"Meriden," George said. "Now why would anybody want to go there? Nothing has happened in Meriden since Woodrow Wilson dedicated a bird sanctuary there in 1913."

As the Lancia climbed the formidable hill past the old brick dormitories of Kimball Union Academy, George could not help reflecting, in spite of his preoccupation with the chase, that this tiny and isolated village had a certain unquaint, go-to-hell charm that was lacking in the precious *hameaux d'art* of Vermont and Massachusetts. Tisza, too, was impressed.

"But this is *szepe*," she said. "Lovely."

Beyond the main group of houses they dropped down the other side of the hill into a pocket where the paving ended abruptly. The Cadillac was nowhere in sight. Three narrow roads spread out like crooked fingers, the center one following a winding brook and the others reaching up into the wooded hills on either side. Stephen braked to a stop and looked at George.

"Your move, chum," he said.

George considered briefly. He knew this country quite well. It was a good place for grouse and deer, and at times the fishing in Blood's Brook was not too bad. "Take the left-handed road, through the covered bridge," he said. "I'll explain why later, if you're interested."

They climbed steeply for more than a mile to a height of land where the road forked again. George motioned to the right. "The other is impassable after a little bit," he said.

Stephen dropped into second gear and then first as they crawled down a precipitous, rain-scoured track, with cherry brush scraping the car on both sides. He grinned at George.

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"If you say the other road is impassable," he said, "I believe you."

When they crossed another bridge and came out on a fairly smooth gravel surface, George shook his head. "We're back on Blood's Brook Road. This was the central branch from where the pavement ended. I passed it up back there because it's only a short cut from Meriden to Hanover. If that's where our friends were going I didn't think they'd drive all over northeast hell to get there. Now I guess our luck's out."

"What about the right-hand road back at the end of the hard surface?" Stephen asked him.

"Well, they call it High Street, but it wouldn't take a passenger car more than half a mile, nowadays."

"A chap could lose a brigade of infantry easily enough in this bit of country," Stephen said, "but how in the bloody hell could he lose a Cadillac?"

"I don't think he can," George said. "Unless it came out on this road it's still in here, and if it's in here I'll find it. There just aren't that many places it can be. It's country for foot soldiers all right, and that's my previous condition of servitude. I'm coming back here this afternoon and beat the bushes until I find that car."

Stephen said nothing, and George flushed. That was pretty big talk, he thought. But Tisza murmured, "I am glad you say it," and he felt better.

"Let's get on to Hanover," he said. "It's only about ten miles. I might as well drive now."

Around the next bend they came on an old man scything with short feeble strokes along a fence line. George stopped the car, got out, and went over to him.

"Hi," George said. "Been much traffic along here in the past half hour?"

"Nope."

"Any at all?"

"Town truck."

"I was looking for a big black Cadillac, like an undertaker's car."

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"Ain't been along here." The old man removed his cap. Bald headed and beak nosed, he looked like an ancient snapping turtle. "Say, that's quite a rig you're driving," he said. "Foreign car, ain't it? Fellow up in the village got an MG. Makes a hell of a racket. I hear him go by all hours of the night. Must be a son of a gun to get parts. I like a Ford, myself. Pick up parts second hand over in White River. You take that old Ford of mine—Model A, it is—that Ford'll start when it's thirty below just like—"

"I bet it will. Well, I'll be seeing you."

"Sure. So long." The old man put on his cap and went back to work.

George shook his head as he pressed the starter. "Don't let anybody up here sell you those stories about silent New Englanders," he said. "They're just a little slow on the warm-up . . . Well, it looks like the Cadillac is still in here."

"Why don't we pinpoint it now?" Stephen said. "No hurry about getting to Hanover, is there?"

George looked at him. He had been conscious of a slight tension between them since he had spoken about coming back to look for the car in the afternoon. "I've been wondering for quite a while what we were going to do if we caught up with those guys. What's your idea, Stephen?"

"We'll think of something."

"Got a gun?"

"No."

"Neither have I. Look—we're going to need a little help before we tangle with those four characters. All of them armed, probably. Let's get to Hanover and pass the word through Ann that we've got them sort of bottled up. Then I'll come back. I know this country. I'll do a little scouting. Let the G-men run the closing-in operation."

"You have reason, George," Tisza said.

"You've probably saved our lives, old boy," Stephen said, with what George thought might be a touch of sarcasm.

He put the car in gear and eased out the clutch. "Anyway, I'm hungry," he said. "How about you two?"

CHAPTER FIVE

THEY WERE SITTING in George's farmhouse topping off their lunch with Mrs. Perley's apple pie when the telephone rang.

"We finally got your call through to Washington, George," the operator said.

"Thanks, Bertha . . . Hello, Ann?"

"Georgie—?"

"Listen, Ann. I've seen Phil. Pass this on to your Voice, will you? We trailed the black car to—"

"Georgie—Georgie—" Ann was so urgent that the receiver buzzed at his ear. "You couldn't have seen Phil. *He caught the Clipper for Paris at midnight!* Uncle Bill called me early this morning."

"Ann—that's impossible. Are you sure? *Who* is Uncle Bill?"

"No, Georgie; it's all right. The Voice is Uncle Bill—that's what Phil calls him, he said. I called Idlewild myself afterward, just to make sure. Philip Farrell's was the last embarkation card filed, and a man at the PanAm desk remembers, because Philip came rushing up barely in time to be processed for the plane."

George's brain spun, and he damned his own stupidity. He could have checked on that himself. Phil must have dashed into the PanAm building at Idlewild within minutes after he and Stephen had left the terminal. This, of course, changed the whole picture. "Just a minute, Ann," he said. "Let me think a minute."

If Phil was en route to Paris, he thought, who was the young man he had seen in the Cadillac—the one he had been so sure was his brother? Well, the face had been turned away from him, and the car was moving fast. Had it been Phil who got into the Cadillac at Idlewild in the first place? The cab starter had said only that a younger fellow was with the man who was presumably Michael Swan. If Phil was okay, George thought, that actually ended his own personal interest

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in the operation, although it left a lot of unanswered questions. Which were probably none of his business.

"Are you there, Georgie?" Ann's voice asked.

"Yes. Sorry. I'm tremendously glad about Phil, of course. But you did stagger me. I was positive I'd seen him this morning in that car. I didn't really have a look at the guy's face, though."

"Did you see Tisza's father? You said earlier he was with Philip."

"Yes, Ann. I can't figure all this out, but these thugs do seem to have Michael Swan. I'm sure the FBI or Phil's crowd—Uncle Bill—is still interested in them. Now listen—we think we've got the Cadillac more or less located. Take this down, will you? Pass it on to Uncle Bill. And tell him it might be useful if he'd send somebody up here to contact me . . ."

George gave her a description of the area near Meriden where they had last seen the black car. Ann sent her love to Tisza and they hung up.

Stephen and Tisza stared at him as he sat down at the table and filled them in on what Ann had told him. After that there was silence.

"Well, George, it was jolly to have you along with us," Stephen said at last. There was no bitterness in his voice.

George shook his head. "I'm not going to bug out on you. I know this part of the country; you don't. I said I'd find that Cadillac and I'm going to have a try."

Tisza's green eyes were on him. She was smiling gently. "You say in effect that you will find Philip. He have been found. I am glad for you. It is no longer your affair, and you are owing us nothing."

He stood up. "Damn it," he said, "are we friends or aren't we?" He was looking at Tisza, and he saw tears forming in her eyes. To his astonishment Stephen too was blinking and biting his lips.

"Tisza and I are Hungarians," Stephen said after a moment. "We're bloody emotional about things like this. God help us all if there was a gypsy orchestra."

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A little embarrassed, George went over to the sideboard and poured three cocktail glasses full of cognac. He brought them to the table. The other two rose and touched their glasses to his. "*Egysegera*," Tisza said. "It is the bottom up."

Quite a little ceremony, George thought wryly. But something, maybe the brandy, made him feel very good.

The Lancia had been put in the wagon shed, and George took his own Corvette for his call on Colonel Thompson. He was not at all sure now that the colonel's story would have any bearing on the kidnaping of Michael Swan, but he decided to check it out. On his way to the campus he stopped at the hardware store. He bought a slim box containing five rifled slugs for a 20-gauge shotgun.

"Deer season coming up pretty soon," he explained to the storekeeper.

"Thought you used one of those foreign rifles—Mannlicher-Something."

"I do, when I'm out for deer. But I just might see that big buck when I'm hunting birds."

"Might."

He was kept waiting outside Colonel Thompson's private office, although the door was open. He could hear a student inside, explaining the unfortunate circumstances which had led to an excessive number of absences from Military Science classes. In a few minutes the student came out, a sergeant entered, reappeared, and told George he could go in. From behind a desk in the little room a pair of icy blue eyes fixed on him and he had an involuntary impulse to stand at attention, but at once the colonel rose and stretched out his hand.

"Pleasure to see you, Mr. Farrell. Have a seat. What can we do for you?"

George explained about Philip's cryptic call the day before. He gave no indication of what had happened later. He said merely that Philip had referred him to Colonel Thompson for a little background; that he had unfortunately missed the

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colonel yesterday. The tall soldier got up and closed the door. His lean jaw was tense.

"Did you, then, actually meet your brother in New York?"

"No—something went wrong with our arrangements. He was to catch a plane for Paris later, and I understand that's what he did."

"Mr. Farrell," the colonel said, "are you an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation?"

"No, sir," George said. "I got into this thing because Philip apparently needed me. If there's anything I can do, I don't want to let my brother down."

"This matter is highly classified," the colonel said.

George felt anger begin to pound in his head. So this, he thought, is why the old fool never got anywhere. Scared to death of the newspapers. "Major Farrell called your office to clear me," he said evenly. "You were not here. So an important message from Washington got no action. I cannot admire your staff arrangements, Colonel."

Thompson looked bleak. Then he gave George a twisted smile. "I take it that you were in the Service, Mr. Farrell."

"I was. And I was born at Fort Leavenworth—grew up on Army posts."

"Your father was—?"

"Franklin Farrell. He retired two years ago."

The older man's eyes were distant. "Class of '22. I remember him." He got up from his desk. "Have you a car outside? We can talk better out there."

They pulled up by St. Denis' Church, across from the stadium. George noted that it was past noon. He hoped that Colonel Thompson would not stretch his story out unduly. "I don't want to take up too much of your time, sir," he said.

"You won't. I haven't very much to tell you. But for what it's worth to you, this is what Janos Kiraly told me."

"Janos Kiraly?"

"A student here, a Hungarian refugee. About two weeks ago he came to me with a fantastic story. Why he came to me I don't know, except that I wear a uniform and he seemed to

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feel that somehow I represented the United States Government. Which, of course, I do—in my proper field. Anyway, it seems that this Kiraly had been on a party, celebrating some national holiday with most of the Hungarian students—we have about forty here—and a good many of the older refugees who have settled in this area. They took over a resort hotel up in the mountains near Etna—brought up a gypsy orchestra from New York. They were, as my students might say, having themselves a ball.”

George wondered what all this had to do with Philip, but the colonel was warming up to his story and there was nothing to do but hear him out.

“Well, Kiraly admits that he had a little more wine than he really needed. So did a good many others. About midnight he stepped outside, maybe to clear his head a little. He was taking it easy in a kind of summer-house among the trees, and he says it was very dark. Pretty soon two men came along and sat down on the steps. They had been drinking plenty too. He thinks they were older men, not students. They started talking, in Hungarian, of course.

“At first Kiraly didn’t pay much attention. But he noticed that there were a lot of Party cliches in their conversation—‘American imperialists,’ ‘fascist reactionaries,’ and so forth. He makes quite a point that they used these phrases seriously; not, he says, in a joking way as he and his friends might.” Colonel Thompson shifted his long body on the low leather seat and seemed to be organizing the story’s climax in his mind. “Well, what it boiled down to is this: he heard one of them say that a certain officer of the American General Staff wanted to defect to the Soviets. This fellow had been stationed in Hungary at one time, and he had made contact with a Hungarian Communist agent here in the United States—man named Hattyu.”

“Hattyu?” It came out before George could catch himself.

The colonel looked at him sharply. “You know him?”

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"No—no. I thought I'd better remember the name if my brother gets me involved in this." George's head was spinning again. So Michael Swan—Hattyu—was an AVH agent. What about Tisza, then? What about Stephen? Had Philip known Hattyu was a Communist agent? Was the young man he had mistaken for Philip actually the American traitor? It didn't make sense. He tried to concentrate on the rest of the story.

"Well, anyway," the colonel was saying, "the Russians apparently weren't too keen about this deal—thought it was a plant, of course. So they told their Hungarian stooges to give the American a real check-out. It seems this Hattyu was going to bring the American up to Woodstock for 'treatment'—that was the word they used. These two men that Janos Kiraly overheard were going to help out on the job. They were going to pick up Hattyu and the American in New York. One of them was briefing the other on the details."

George stared at the colonel. "Is that all Kiraly heard?"

"That's the story. That's all I have to tell you."

"Well, thanks very much, Colonel. Do you mind saying whom you've told this to?"

"I've reported it through channels," Colonel Thompson said, a little stiffly. "Operational channels. I'm not in Intelligence—never have been. In briefing you I have followed the only instructions I received in this matter. I have dealt only with facts as reported to me by a refugee student. I have not speculated on their accuracy and I am not curious about what you intend to do with them."

Not a bad old colonel, George thought—but he wondered whether the Army stuffed their shirts for them or merely attracted the type. Nothing would be gained by offering him lunch. "Well," he said. "Thanks again. Do you want to go back to the ROTC office, or can I drop you somewhere else?"

"The office, please. I have to report that I have carried out my instructions."

George knew that in case he got himself into difficulties in

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this business it would do no good to call upon Colonel Thompson. The United States Army had done its duty and washed its hands.

CHAPTER SIX

BACK AT THE farmhouse, George gave Tisza and Stephen a somewhat sanitized version of the colonel's story. The two names—Hattyu and Kiraly—he decided to omit. But he had now concluded, on the basis of Stephen's earlier explanation of the AVH apparatus, that both Stephen and Tisza were probably in the clear—whatever her father might be involved in. That was for the Government boys to figure out. The one thing he had to do now was to locate the black Cadillac, which should pinpoint the AVH hide-out. Any citizen in his place, he thought, should do that much. After all, he knew the area intimately, and time was certainly a factor. The FBI, apparently had not been able to get anybody up here yet. And he had only about five hours of daylight.

He said, "I'm going after the Cadillac now."

"I'd best go along," Stephen said.

"No, I don't think so. I'm wearing hunting clothes and carrying a shotgun. I'll take my spaniel. The grouse season has just opened, and that will be my cover if I run onto anybody in the woods."

"It seems a very sound idea," Stephen said. "But shouldn't you take a rifle rather than a shotgun? You may just happen to need it."

"Somebody might wonder what I was doing in the woods with a high-powered rifle three weeks before the deer season opens." George decided against mentioning his box of slugs. He thought for a moment. "Here's what you could do, Stephen: Didn't you say you have some of your boys up here at Dartmouth—somebody that's in this screening operation with you? Why not go over to the college and make a contact? What bothers me is the way Woodstock keeps cropping in this business. That's twenty-odd miles from Meriden, where we last saw the Cadillac. Maybe your people have got something new on this AVH location."

Stephen nodded slowly. "Excellent. I think you have some-

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thing. By the way, do you know that chap's name—the one who told your colonel about the midnight conversation?"

"The colonel didn't say," George lied, and wondered with a sinking feeling why Stephen wanted to know. "Well, I'm going to get the Jeep. Want to come outside and look around the place?"

The three walked out into the sunlight toward the wagon shed. Sooky, George's springer spaniel, was romping in circles, excited at the prospect of shooting.

An idea had been forming in George's mind. "Can you drive a car?" he asked Tisza.

"Oh yes. I do not much like American cars, with everything power and automatic. But I am driving them."

"Mine has manual shift; four speeds, like the European jobs. Now—could you find that spot where we were this morning where the paving ended just outside Meriden?"

"The pretty little village. Yes I find."

"And you remember the fork we took through the covered bridge and up a hill to another road junction?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, look: if anything develops that I ought to know about right away—if the FBI boys want to contact me—why don't you take my car and drive out to that road junction? Just blast the horn every few minutes until I show up. I won't be far away, and I'll check in there before dark in any case."

After a moment Stephen said, "That could be a bit sticky, old boy. These AVH types could have pickets out, you know. I'd rather take on that assignment myself."

"You're right, of course," George said, feeling stupid. "Forget it, Tisza. My combat sense is getting rusty."

"But no! Stephen is being occupied by the College. It is nothing to worry. If AVH are coming, I speak only English. I am just one sweet American kid. It is not interesting to them."

George had to smile, but he was worried now and regretted his idea. "Don't do it," he said. "Stephen is right—it's too risky. Maybe if the Government lads should show up here

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in person you could guide them to the road junction. Otherwise, skip it. Please, Tisza."

"It will be my judgment what I must do if the case arises," she said firmly.

Stephen shrugged. "You'll have to leave it there," he told George. "It's unprofitable to argue with Miss Swan. You probably didn't know that she put 'Paid' to two Russian tanks before she left Budapest."

Twenty minutes later he had hidden the Jeep in the woods near the road junction which he had described earlier to Tisza. He examined both roads carefully, looking for some indication that a heavily loaded car had passed that way, but the dry, leaf-filled ruts gave him no clear sign. Sooky, of course, was not interested in the road. She was sniffing through the thickets, her stumpy tail vibrating. Well, George thought, he'd better try the left-hand fork which they had passed up that morning. It would take a big car only half a mile, to a dead end at Pete Henry's place. In winter, he knew, the snowplow went up that far. He broke open his shotgun and loaded two slug shells. Never having used slugs on deer—the idea was distasteful—he was not sure what effective range he could expect from them. Fifty or sixty yards, maybe. His stomach contracted when he thought of what they would do to a man at close range.

He sloped the gun on his shoulder as he walked along the road. It was fairly level, holding to the ridge line. Beeches and sugar maples glowed in the yellowing sunlight of mid-afternoon. There was a good smell of dry leaves under his feet. Sooky quartered in a businesslike way ahead of him, covering both sides of the road, and he could not help wishing that a brace or two of partridges was actually what he was out for. Although perhaps a little dry and still for the bitch's nose, the day was otherwise perfect for good shooting.

Not more than four hundred yards from the fork he stopped with a silent exclamation. Winding down the wooded hillside to his right was a branch road, entirely passable for

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any car. He could have sworn there was no such road there last December, at the end of the deer season. Yes, he saw on closer examination that the road had been cleared out quite recently; the stumps alongside were raw; and the square, hardened prints of a bulldozer's tread could still be seen in the dry earth. It was a typical access road for a new lumbering operation, not yet rutted by the big log-loaded trucks.

He moved to follow it but almost immediately stopped short. The long-buried caution of a jungle scout was stirring in him. He wanted to know everything he could find out concerning what might lie ahead—the latest combat intelligence. Walking rapidly back to the Jeep, he piled the unwilling Sooky inside and drove slowly along the ridge road which he had been following on foot. A few minutes later he pulled into Pete Henry's yard at the end of the road. The old bachelor was nailing orange building paper along the foundation on his weather-beaten house—a sure sign of coming winter.

After exchanging greetings, meteorological observations, and views on the partridge prospects, George brought up the subject of the new road.

"Who's cutting west of the ridge?" he asked.

Pete's face was plain and weatherworn as his house. He blinked into the sun. "Seems like they might be Frenchmen. From up in Quebec, likely. Man has trouble to understand them. Not that they do much talking. See them down to the store once in a while."

"Big operation?"

"Ain't hardly got started yet. Road's only been in about six weeks. But they say down to the village it's going to be big. Bought up the whole of the old Mock place. Two thousand acres, more or less—like the deeds say. Tell you this—they ain't poor people."

"No?"

"Damn right they ain't. Know what they been using for a doodle wagon? Cadillac sedan."

George expressed proper amazement at the strange ways

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of Frenchmen and other outlanders, He wondered aloud if they expected equally luxurious living accommodations. "I think I've heard that the old Mock place still has a house on it," he said. "I never got all the way in there. Posted, if I remember."

"Yep, there's a big house still standing; one of the few around here that was never burned out." He accepted a cigarette and a light. He blew out the smoke slowly. Living alone as he did, Pete enjoyed a chat as much as anybody.

"Seventy-five years ago," he resumed, "Old Man Mock was the richest farmer around Meriden. Ran a thousand head of sheep. Hard to believe, but these woods was most all pasture in them days." Pete spat and looked at the cigarette with disapproval. "Then they started raising wool out West. Finished the sheep business in these parts. Old Mock died in nineteen-ought-three. The old house is there, all right. 'Twas the first place for miles around to have wall-paper, they say. Make a nice lumber camp for them Frenchmen. Ain't been a way to get to it, except afoot, for—oh, thirty years. It's about two miles down that new road they made."

"Well, maybe I'll walk down that way. Ought to be some birds in there."

"Ought to be . . . Well, be seeing you." Pete Henry turned back to his work with a hand wave as George pressed the starter.

He hid the Jeep again at the road fork and walked back to the start of the new road. Maybe he was being overcautious, he thought, but he was glad he had talked to Pete Henry. Now he was pretty sure he was on the right track. He followed the general direction of the new road down the hill, keeping well within the woods on one side. It was hard going through the juniper and buckthorn. He moved slowly and tried to avoid unnecessary noise.

It was a long two miles. The sun was low, orange colored, as he came onto the edge of a wide clearing, and the glare in his eyes prevented his seeing the house immediately. Squinting into the strong light he discerned its unpainted

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bulk as a darker mass against dark pine trees. He stepped hastily back into the forest cover and began a careful movement around the clearing in order to get the setting sun behind him.

He had detected no sign of life in his glimpse of the cleared area. When he stopped to listen, the quiet around him was profound. There was not the slightest breeze to rustle the pine boughs, no call of distant crow or blue jay. The occasional whisper of Sooky's pads on the dry leaves only emphasized the silence. It was hard for him to realize that he had had the cacophony of New York traffic in his ears only a few hours before. Almost incredible, he thought, how his brother's call had taken him to New York and brought him back again to these familiar hills without giving him any real knowledge of what he was doing or why. Philip's connection with this strange business, like his own, was still unestablished. Undoubtedly Phil had landed at Orly by now—probably enjoying a two-hour lunch somewhere in Paris. Well, George only had to be sure that the old Mock house was related to the Cadillac they had followed this morning. Then he could turn the whole thing over to the Government men. Possibly they had contacted Tisza by this time and were already on their way to join him at the road junction.

He thought of Tisza with a little flow of happiness, but it dried up in him when he remembered that Michael Hattyu was her father. He could only hope she would not be crushed by the discovery of Hattyu's involvement with the enemies of her country. Then doubts of her own position began to assail him again. With a sense of depression he realized that it was Tisza's message which had brought him to her father's apartment and was quite possibly responsible for his failure to meet Philip. Could she have switched the messages at the Plaza desk? He had only Stephen's statement that Tisza had fought against the Russians in Budapest. Well, he decided, this gloomy speculation was not helping him to get on with his immediate job.

With his flanking movement completed, he had the sun

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at his back. Now he found he could get much closer to the house on this side of the clearing without leaving the concealment of the woods; in fact, a company of pines and hemlocks marched up flush against the back of the ell. That would be an unfinished shed, if the house followed the typical New England pattern. He decided it would be practicable to have a look inside. Quietly he told Sooky to stay put. He crawled up to the back of the ell. The gray vertical boards, ridged by weather and still faintly stained with red, had shrunk apart during a hundred years of sun, rain, and snow. George put his eye to a convenient crack. Inside the ell, streaked by thin sunbeams, was the black Cadillac.

He took a deep breath. Mission accomplished, he thought. He was light-headed with relief and satisfaction. The FBI could take it from here. They could blast the place to splinters if they wanted to, including the American traitor and Michael Hattyu. He couldn't care less.

He peered into the ell once more, to memorize the license number, and then glanced at the setting sun behind him. With the compass directions fixed in his mind, he reckoned he could cut northeast through the woods to his Jeep, avoiding any contact with the access road. No point in taking risks, now that the job was over. He might even have a shot or two at grouse after he got far enough away from the hide-out. Feeling very pleased with himself, he began to work his way back around the clearing.

He had gone perhaps fifty yards when he heard a door open and close on rusty hinges. He dropped to his knees and froze in position behind a low hemlock. He motioned Sooky close to his side. After a moment he parted the branches cautiously and peered through them. Now he could see the angle where the ell joined the main part of the house. There was a small porch, and a man was standing on the steps lighting a cigarette. He wore a cap and the dull red mackinaw of a logger. When the man's hands came down from his cigarette, George felt blood drumming in his ears. Beyond any possibility of doubt it was his brother Philip.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PHILIP, then, must be the traitor. Was that possible? The idea came with shocking impact and George tried numbly to reject it. But he was forced to reflect he did not really know his brother very well. Almost twenty years had passed since they were boys together. The world had changed in twenty years. During the past year alone the international power balance had shifted precariously. No one would understand the consequences better than a staff officer in Joint War Plans. The thought chilled George like a cold wind from the East. The ghost of Benedict Arnold stood for a moment beside Philip on the shadowed porch.

Then George was struck by a monstrous explanation of his brother's telephone call. Could Philip's mind have been so distorted by fear that he had had some crazy idea of urging George to join him in flight from inevitable disaster? Would that be the reaction of a man who was convinced that the Soviet Union now had the capability and the intention of destroying the United States? He shook his head. My God, he thought, it's my own mind I'm losing. How could Philip think of leaving Ann and Junior? How could he even consider a half-life in a barren People's Paradise? How could he pay the admission price, which was betrayal of what his family and his profession stood for? Yet incredible as these possibilities were, George had lived in New England long enough to know that the human brain is subject to some very strange aberrations. He lay still among the small dead cones of the hemlock, and for a minute he thought of nothing at all.

The more credible, even obvious, explanation formed slowly in his consciousness. When the pieces coalesced the truth came over him all at once. The Russians were of course correct in suspecting that an American officer so apparently ripe

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for defection was indeed a plant. He could see now that Philip was trying his hand at a very old and very dangerous game—playing the traitor in his own country's service. He was overwhelmed with relief and with shame for his earlier reaction. But as he grasped the thought it seemed a crude and clumsy attempt that was being made. No wonder the Soviet Embassy, according to Janos Kiraly's story, had penetrated it. Or had they? Surely Phil's outfit was capable of some subtlety. He realized that he had no idea what masses of convincing detail might have been manufactured to give the scheme a reasonable chance of succeeding.

His own role, he now saw, was unfortunate. His meddling—he must call it that—was jeopardizing the whole delicately balanced operation. No wonder he had got no reaction from the FBI. They were probably trying now to call him off without arousing his suspicion. That might explain the rather elaborate device of putting somebody aboard the Clipper under Philip's name. Well, he thought with some chagrin, so ended his short and happy life as a secret agent. It had lasted almost twenty-four hours from the time Tisza had opened her apartment door to him. He had not slept in that period. All at once he felt very tired.

Twilight was fading now, and George knew he would need the last of it for his bushwhacking trip back to the Jeep. He peered through the hemlock once more for a last sight of his brother—silently to wish him luck. Philip looked very lonely as he stood on the porch, smoking and staring off across the clearing. Then the door opened again, and a very big man stepped out on the porch. Incongruously, he wore a black Homburg and a rather formal topcoat, but he had the size and bearing of a prize-winning bull. He grinned at Philip, and there was still enough light for George to discern sensuality and shrewdness in his putty-like face. More than a little, he looked like Nikita Khrushchev—in a younger, much bigger version. The two on the porch exchanged a few remarks in what George now recognized as Hungarian. He had not known that Philip spoke it.

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Presently a man wearing a gray twill chauffeur's uniform came through the open door. He went directly to the shed and backed the Cadillac out. The big fellow, with a friendly salute to Philip, got in beside the driver and the black sedan lurched heavily across the clearing headed for the access road. Philip tossed away his cigarette and went into the house.

Moving as quietly as he could in the gathering darkness, George set out for the Jeep. Sooky kept close to his heels. He had reckoned that the two-mile walk through the woods would take about an hour in daylight. Now he would probably need at least twice that. Several times he tripped on roots, and briars tore at his hands and face. His shotgun was an increasing burden. He was glad when he got far enough away from the house to disregard the cracking of twigs under his feet.

The forest canopy was thick overhead, and he could see no recognizable stars to hold his course by, but the general upward slope should be a sufficient guide. At one point he had to retrace his steps in order to bypass an impenetrable stand of young pines. When he had out-flanked them and stopped to estimate his position, he discovered that he was on a sort of nose; the ground fell away in all directions except where the pine thicket made passage impossible. Visibility was too limited to give him an idea of the broader land formation. Of course he had a sense of direction, an instinctive feeling that he knew which way to go. But he was woodsman enough to distrust a so-called sense of direction, especially in the dark. In fact, he was lost and he knew it. He sensed the beginning of panic that strikes almost any man with that realization, but he got hold of himself at once. Like most experienced hunters he had been lost before. It was not a serious matter in this part of the country, provided the weather was decent and a man kept his head. At worst, he could simply remain where he was until first light. He sat down on a deadfall and lit a cigarette. Sooky came up and lay at his feet. The dog was tired, too.

It was then that he heard an automobile horn in the dis-

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tance—one long blast, faint but clear. He tried to fix the direction. It was well to the right of where he had guessed the road junction might be. Two minutes later it sounded again from the same spot. So it was Tisza—or possibly Stephen. He had the line now—Sooky helped by straining toward the sound—and he started out confidently. Counting the seconds to himself, he paused every two minutes for the horn, and it guided him like a beacon. But the ground was rough and the obstacles frequent. He stumbled often. Now his clothes were torn in several places and he was getting badly scratched. He was pressing hard, curious about what might have brought Tisza out to meet him. It could hardly have been the arrival of FBI agents; he was sure now that they had the word to keep out of this.

The horn signals guided George for almost half an hour. By that time they sounded quite loud; he guessed he was within a few hundred yards of the car and expected soon to pick up the parking lights which Tisza had no doubt turned on. That was when he missed the signal. He stopped and counted out another two minutes. At first he heard nothing but the pounding of his pulse and his own heavy breathing. Then he caught the rising whine of a departing automobile. She's given up and gone home, he thought. But it hadn't sounded like the full-throated growl of his Corvette. Nor the Lancia either. More like the faint siren tone of a big automatic transmission, rapidly accelerated. He had another moment near to panic. He charged toward the junction, tripping and struggling through the brush. Within a minute or two he heard the horn again—now recognizable, he thought, as his own car's. But the pattern had changed a little; both the length of the blast and the silent interval were shorter.

When he came out on the road he was gasping. His eyes watered and his cheeks stung from the whipping the underbrush had given him. He made out the low pale bulk of his Corvette. When he ran toward it, calling Tisza's name, someone slipped from behind the wheel and turned to face him. He saw the muzzle flash an instant before he heard the flat

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roar of the pistol. He dived for the roadside, bringing up his shotgun with a reflex forward flick of the safety, and blasted with both barrels in the direction of the pistol flash. Flinching against the expected return fire, he lay tense for a long moment, but nothing happened. He crawled slowly up to the car. Crouching behind it, he reloaded his gun and waited. The silence was massive.

At last he stood up and stepped out in the road with his gun ready. Something dark was sprawled near the car's front fender. Sick and trembling, he reached over the door and switched on the headlights. In the white glare he saw a man's face ghastly against dead leaves. Below the face a dark, wet hole gaped. Quite plainly the man was dead; one of the big slugs had caught him high on the chest. But it was not Stephen Szabo-Lewis, as George had somehow feared it would be. It was the chauffeur who had driven the Cadillac away from the hideout.

Thirteen years had passed since George had killed a man, and he was suddenly so weak he could not stand. He slumped onto the seat of his car and tried to pull himself together. He turned off the headlights. Something flashed over the offside door and came down on the seat beside him. Sooky.

After a few minutes George's numbed brain began functioning again. He tried to reconstruct what had happened. Someone—Tisza or Stephen—had come in the Corvette to meet him. The Cadillac, making its return trip to the hide-out at the Mock place, had approached. The two men in the Cadillac had had plenty of warning from the Corvette's horn that somebody was up ahead. Possibly they got out of their car and came up on foot. What happened then? Had they recognized whoever was in the Corvette? Had there been a short, unequal struggle? Or had it been a meeting of old friends? Anyway, he guessed that the big fellow had driven off in the Cadillac with a passenger, willing or unwilling. The chauffeur who now lay dead on the road had been left behind, obviously to decoy George and, it seemed, to kill him.

He rubbed his fists in his eyes, fighting off an unreasonable

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urge to fall asleep. His mind was clinging to the problem, but lethargy had seized his body and was reaching for his brain. Couldn't he let sleep move in on him for—an hour? Five minutes? Through his leaden stupor George became aware that Sooky was sniffing and pawing at something wedged between the seat and the right-hand door. Her short tail was wagging. He spoke sharply to her and reached for the object. It was a woman's handbag—Tisza's. He pushed himself out of the car and breathed the night air in deep. That cleared his head a little.

His next move, he realized, depended on whether Tisza had got into the Cadillac willingly or as a prisoner. He would not face the possibility that she had been killed; not yet, anyway. If she had been kidnaped, he had a job to do. His emotions screamed at him that she had been taken by force and compelled to go along with the big man. He closed his eyes and let a wave of homicidal passion sweep over him, the impulse to assault, to go in shooting. But shoot what? He had three slugs left. And where? Had Tisza been taken to the old Mock place? He couldn't be sure. As his combat judgment emerged to override his emotions, he began to think reluctantly of another possibility—that Tisza and Stephen were part of this AVH business, that he was getting in their way and they had decided to eliminate him. All his feelings rebelled at the idea, but he had his feelings under control now, and he made himself look at facts.

It was indeed possible, he reasoned, that Tisza and Stephen were drawn to him personally as he was to them. But family ties and political loyalties could certainly come out ahead of friendship. Tisza was Hattyu's daughter; Stephen was his close associate. True, it was Stephen who picked up the lead at Idlewild and helped trail the Cadillac to New Hampshire, who in fact exposed to him the existence of the AVH conspiracy. But George realized that he had been an awkward loose end that would eventually have to be taken care of. He had been aware that his brother wanted to tell him something that might be discovered from other sources. He was

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therefore a potential danger to the AVH operation if left to himself. He recalled that he had been kept under pretty close observation until this afternoon. It seemed entirely possible that he had been maneuvered up here near the hideout for some such ending as the one he had just escaped.

Well, in any case the sensible thing to do now was to tell the whole story to the FBI . . . Then he began to see what he had to do. Philip had wanted to talk to him. But meeting the AVH crowd at Idlewild had caught Phil short; there was nothing he could do except go along. Damnation, George thought, his brother still had something important to say to him. That was the key to the whole thing. He cursed himself for not trying to contact Phil at the Mock place after the Cadillac left. He'd have to go back. No doubt that was where Tisza had been taken, anyway. But first he'd have to do something about this . . .

He bent over the body and struck his lighter to see exactly what his shot had done. Some blood—surprisingly little—dripped very slowly from the gray twill-covered elbow. The lighter went out. George moved to the glove compartment and found a flashlight; then he took the tonneau cover from the trunk and managed to wrap it around the dead man like a crude shroud. He lifted the corpse to a sitting position, got his weight under, and hoisted it onto the seat of his car. Sooky dropped to the floor, whimpering and trembling. George flashed his light on the dead leaves where the body had lain. He spotted the man's pistol, a service-worn P. 38. Although he was not very familiar with the Nazi side-arm, he could not miss the swastika stamped on the receiver. It was at full cock. He pushed the safety down and was startled when the hammer fell. But the pistol did not fire, and he put it in the pocket of his hunting coat. After kicking up the leaves to cover any blood, he realized that he should have looked first for the empty cartridge case. Too late now, he decided. And there would be nothing suspicious about his own spent shotgun shells near grouse cover. He got behind the wheel and started the car, easing it along slowly without lights while the

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body bumped heavily against his shoulder in grisly intimacy. When he had gone several hundred yards past the access road to the Mock place, he stopped and got out. Using his flashlight only when he had to, he walked into the woods. Within a few minutes he found what he was looking for: the crater left by the roots of a wind-felled tree, with the tangled root mass rising like a wall from one edge. He returned to the car. By squatting on the ground next to the open door, he was able to work the awkward bundle onto his back.

The night air was sharp, but he was sweating under his light jacket. When at last he had rolled the shrouded body into the root crater, he dropped to the ground and lay there until his chest had quieted. It took him more than an hour to fill the crater with dead leaves and rotten wood. With an effort he rolled a hollow log on top of it.

He walked back to the car, and drove slowly to Pete Henry's place, still not using his lights. The house was dark; Pete usually turned in early. He parked the car in the yard. He tied Sooky by her leash to the steering wheel, ejected the two slug shells from his shotgun and locked it in the trunk. In any case, Pete would see that Sooky was well taken care of.

On his way back to the Mock place on foot, George used his flashlight twice. Once he checked the time—ten-thirty. Later he examined the mechanism of the pistol. He found that it was ready to fire semi-automatically if the hammer were merely drawn back. There was a round in the chamber and four in the magazine. He regretted not having searched the body for another loaded clip.

Within an hour he was on the edge of the clearing again. He had walked straight down the access road this time, depending on darkness for concealment. There was no light visible in the old house. He rejected the idea of entering it. If he had to shoot in the dark, it might be Philip or Tisza who would stop a bullet. He would lie quietly in the woods until daylight, he decided—maybe even get some sleep. He

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worked his way around to the hemlock from which he had seen Philip that afternoon.

Then he saw a thin crack of light down near the foundation.

He began crawling toward it. After each few feet gained he lay still, listening. It was strangely familiar, the tense silence of a night patrol. When he got up close to the house he saw that the slit of light came from a cellar window, apparently curtained almost to the bottom. By lying flat on his side he could peer in. His brother was sitting on a bed, alone in a small, low-ceilinged room. He was writing in a notebook by the light of an oil lamp.

George rapped tentatively, very lightly, on the window. Philip glanced up momentarily, but went back to his writing. George tried again. He did not dare to rap harder. This time his brother did not even look up. What sound pattern would Philip recognize instantly—radio code? Unquestionably. He could just recall the dots and dashes for P, H, or I—He tapped it out softly. This time Philip stared at the window. George tapped out the letters again. A puzzled half-smile came on Philip's face. Then he turned and blew out the lamp.

In a few seconds George heard a faint scratching at the window sill. He could just make out something emerging from the crack where the sill and the window met. He picked it up—a scrap of paper. At once the lamp came on, but when he peered into the room Philip was not in sight. By shifting the paper in the slit of light he could read the message:

Who?

George found the pencil stub in his shirt pocket and was thankful for the newspaperman's habit of never being without one. He wrote blindly in the dark:

George.

Is Tisza here?

Is she AVH?

Are you O K?

Should I call FBI?

He slipped the note through the crack and looked inside again. Philip was standing near the window now, pointing

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with his pencil to George's first question and shaking his head. He looked a little puzzled. He moved to the second question and indicated a vigorous negative. The third got a casual affirmative. Finally, a very strong negative on the FBI. Then he held up a finger and started writing another message. When George took it he read:

Much too risky for you here. Don't come back. Tell Uncle Bill thru Ann that Niki Svidirov is here. He also has separate HQ which I saw marked on USGS Woodstock Vt. quad, existing bldg. estimate coords inches 11-9. Pass this back for burning. God Bless.

Well, that covers just about everything, George thought. The lamp had gone out again, and he had a feeling it would not be re-lit. Should he add a final word about having killed the chauffeur? Mention the kidnaping of Tisza? No, he decided, it would not help his brother to know these things. Better for him to be honestly ignorant when the story broke. George pushed the note into the crack, saw it disappear, and moved silently away from the house.

Picking his way back up the access road in the darkness, he tried to plan his next move. For better or worse he had made one decision. Regardless of how it affected this scheme to plant his brother in the Communist apparatus, he was going to make his play to get Tisza free. Undoubtedly, he now supposed, Svidirov had taken her to the Woodstock headquarters. There was only one thing to do—go there. But first he had to have a look at the Geological Survey map and plot the location Philip had given him. He was sure he had the Hanover quadrangle and most of the adjacent sheets in his desk at home. And of course he wanted Stephen's help. So the first step was simply to reach his car and drive home.

That was as far as his sluggish brain would take him. He shambled along in a daze of weariness. It seemed enough for the present if he could get to Pete Henry's place and sink into the seat of his car. The Jeep was closer, but he wanted

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the faster Corvette for the long drive to Woodstock. In spite of that, he was tempted to go to the Jeep because that would save him almost half a mile of walking. Every step he took was becoming an act of will; he could not endure the thought of extra effort. Then he had what struck him as a very good idea. He could go first to the Jeep, drive it to Pete's place, get the Corvette, and leave the Jeep there. It was like one of those mildly complex arrangements that always seem to delight drunks. Well, he was not drunk, but he felt doped by the accumulating fatigue poisons in his body. He knew he was perilously close to stupor.

At the head of the access road he turned left toward the road junction and the hidden Jeep. He had not gone far when he saw a glow up ahead, silhouetting a rise in the road. Alerted, he stepped into the forest cover and moved cautiously. As he came over the crest the glare of headlights dazzled him for a moment. He lowered himself quickly to the ground. Shading his eyes, he made out the figure of a man standing beside the parked car, holding a chauffeur's octagon-crowned cap. The man stood about where the chauffeur had fallen when George shot him. That was about three hours ago, he guessed. Time enough for the Cadillac to make the round trip to Woodstock. It had to be, because the man was undoubtedly Niki Svidirov.

But had Svidirov actually been to Woodstock? Was Tisza still in the car, by any chance? He had to find out. He knew he was no match for the Russian if it came to close combat. Rolling on his left side, he took the pistol from his pocket and eased the hammer back. He steadied his right hand on his left wrist and lined up the big sights on Svidirov's black hat, clearly outlined against the lights. But he did not squeeze the trigger. He couldn't do it. Killing the driver was one thing; when you're shot at, you shoot back. If he had seen Svidirov lay a hand on Tisza, or if he were sure she was lying bound in the car, it would be different. He simply couldn't make himself press the trigger. Silently damning his own squeamishness, he laid the loaded pistol carefully on the

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ground and pillowed his face to his arms.

To make it right, he knew he would have to move in on the Russian. If Svidirov reached for a gun George could shoot him without compunction. He got up on one knee and gripped the P.38. He was gathering himself for the rush forward when Svidirov grunted and slumped to the ground like a pole-axed steer. Standing over him in the headlight beam was Stephen Szabo-Lewis. He was holding a machinist's hammer.

CHAPTER EIGHT

STEPHEN LOOKED startled when George moved toward him out of the darkness. Then recognition and relief came over his face.

"Seems I've bagged one of them," he said casually. "Big devil, isn't he?"

George went at once to the car and looked inside. Nothing there. He jerked the keys from the ignition and unlocked the trunk. As the spring-loaded panel swung open, interior lights came on. Except for the spare tire it was empty. He turned to Stephen.

"They've got her," he said.

"I thought as much. That's why I tapped this lad. She wasn't at the house when I got back from Dartmouth and Mrs. Perley said she'd driven out to meet you. Where is she? D'you know?"

"Woodstock. Must be there. I think I can pinpoint it as soon as I can get to my maps at home." He outlined his exchange of notes with his brother.

Stephen did not seem astonished. "What are we waiting for?" he said. "Let's get our butts in the saddle."

"I can't stand these headlights," George said, and switched them off. For a moment the darkness was absolute. It was like a long, bad dream, he thought—the same events repeating themselves endlessly, with minor variations, all through the night. How many more bodies would lie in the headlights' beams before the nightmare ended? He had a dreamlike sense of slipping out of his own control.

Stephen took his arm. "What's the trouble with you, old boy?"

"Nothing at all, old fellow. I do this often. Just blasted a chap's guts out. Buried him, of course. My brother's a Communist for the CIA or something. The girl's in a Russian pokey.

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Now we've got another stiff on our hands. And more used cars than the Smiling Swede." He laughed again. "I wonder if my little dog knows me."

He felt Stephen's hand tighten on his shoulder. He shook his head violently and reached hard for reality. "I'm sorry," he mumbled. "What time is it? It's been a very rough night."

"It's been that. And no sleep for you since God knows when. You're all right, George. Touch of post-combat jitters, that's all. Killing chaps takes a bit of getting used to. But this fellow here isn't dead, you know. I slugged him quite carefully; these Italian hammers have a lovely balance. Later he'll tell us anything we need to know, I should think." He knelt beside Svidirov and patted his pockets. He seemed to find nothing significant. "Just give me a hand with this mastodon and we'll be on our way. You can catch a wink or two in the car. Can you spare your belt?"

"Sure. Got belt and suspenders both."

Stephen removed his own necktie. He secured the Russian's massive wrists together behind his back and cinched George's web belt around the ankles. The big man stirred, but did not come back to consciousness. George and Stephen had all they could do to wrestle the huge bulk into the Cadillac.

"I suppose we'll have to take his car all the way," Stephen said. "I don't think we're up to moving him again. Might be a sound idea anyway. We can drive right up to the front door in Woodstock."

That was almost the last thing George remembered. As he dropped into the right front seat he started to tell Stephen more about what had happened. He was dimly aware of Stephen's maneuvers in turning the long car around on the narrow road. Then Stephen was shaking him, and he saw that they were parked beside his own back porch. He felt weak and exhausted. His appetite for sleep was unsatisfied. But he was himself again.

He turned on the dome light and looked back at Svidirov. The Russian was fully conscious but he made no attempt to move. He grinned sardonically at George.

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"You speak English?" George asked him.

He did not acknowledge the question.

"I know he understands Hungarian," George told Stephen.
"You try him."

"Beszel Magyarul?"

Svidirov's eyes did not flicker. He said nothing.

Stephen grunted. "Let's get him in the house," he said. "He'll move under his own power this time. Give me your pistol, please." Stephen removed the magazine and drew back the slide. He deftly caught the ejected cartridge, pressed it into the magazine, and reloaded the chamber. He patted the P.38 affectionately. "I want him to know that she'll go bang if I squeeze her. Now would you mind taking that belt off his ankles?" He spoke sharply to Svidirov in Hungarian. The Russian shrugged his big shoulders and looked questioningly toward the house. His putty face was as mobile as an old actor's.

"Igen," Stephen said, and turned to George. "He understands, all right. Now if you'll lead off—open doors, push light buttons, and such—I'll bring up behind. You know the drill. Not too close to him. Give me room to prang the lad if he gets excited."

George led them through the kitchen and dining room into the library. He turned on his desk lamp. A clock on the desk indicated two forty-five. He hoped old Mrs. Perley was sleeping soundly. While Stephen got Svidirov on the floor with his back to the wall, George found a ruler and the Woodstock quad sheet. Recalling the Army's map co-ordinate system, he measured eleven inches east and nine inches north from the lower left-hand corner. There was only one black building symbol within half an inch of his pencil point. He circled the symbol and studied the road net in the vicinity. Then he took a Vermont road map from a drawer and carefully restituted the building with reference to existing modern roads.

"I've got it," he told Stephen. "Let's go."

"Wait a minute," Stephen said. "We want to be bloody

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sure. Would you please turn on the overhead light?" He took the quad sheet from George and glanced at it. Then he knelt down and held it in front of Svidirov, indicating the circled symbol with his pistol. "*Devawtchka zd'es?*" he said, and remarked aside to George: "That's Russian, chum. I seem to know the word for girl in most languages."

Svidirov was silent. "I didn't expect he'd say," Stephen said, getting up. "Help me cinch his legs again, will you?" George did it while Stephen held the pistol. "Now—do you happen to have a candle?"

George's stomach knotted, but he stepped into the dining room and got one.

"You'd better not watch this," Stephen told him.

"My God—do you have to do that? I don't know—"

"Quite right, George. You don't know. But he does. Look at him."

The sarcastic grin had left Svidirov's bulbous lips. He looked scared. Stephen's voice was flat and cold and much less British.

"I learned this little trick from a filthy swine who looked just like him. I learned it the hard way. Please go outside now."

George went. He poured himself a slug of straight whiskey and drank it in one gulp. He took a cigarette, but when his lighter flared he closed it quickly. Then he went to his bedroom to clean up a little and put on some fresh clothes. As he climbed the stairs he could hear Stephen's voice in the library. When he came down about fifteen minutes later—he had not taken time to shave—he heard another, heavier voice. After a few more minutes the library door opened and Stephen came out.

"He wasn't so tough." Stephen looked at George with understanding. "You don't even need to think about it. Believe me, the threat was sufficient. I merely described the form to him and he knew at once that I'd been to the right school. Until then he'd thought I was English—and he wasn't worried." Stephen smiled, but his eyes were like black vol-

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canic glass. "My grandmother was English," he said. "On me it didn't take."

"Is Tisza—?"

"She's there, all right. Unharmed, so far. They even have a woman there to take care of her. That's what he says, and I believe him. He's afraid to lie to me. They had Tisza spotted from the beginning—expected to pick her up later in New York. You see, they're quite sure Philip is an American agent but they're a little uncertain about Michael. He's been one of their boys for a long time, and they think he may have been honestly—that's Niki's word, not mine—honestly taken in by Philip."

George said nothing for a moment. He was puzzled by Stephen's calm acceptance of Michael Swan—or Hattyu—as a long-time member of the Soviet apparatus. He looked searchingly at his friend and then he saw the tension in the jaw muscles. Stephen was not taking it lightly; he was controlling himself by an effort of will.

"Why do they want her?" George said.

"He didn't tell me." Stephen's voice was thick. "But I think I am in a position to know. You see, things like this have been happening to—friends of mine—for a long time."

"I'm afraid I still don't understand, Stephen."

"You wouldn't. MVD methods aren't too well known in America—yet. I told you they were unsure about Michael. Those chaps don't stay unsure very long. They'll kill him, of course. But they'll break him first. Tisza will be—used in the process."

When he grasped Stephen's meaning George was choked by the rage swelling in his chest. He moved toward the library. He had to kill Svidirov. He wanted to use his hands for it, and then shoot and kick the lifeless body. He cursed himself for not blowing Svidirov's head open when he had his pistol sights on the Russian's skull.

Stephen took his arm firmly. "Where to, old boy?" he said.

"I'm going in there and strangle the dirty beast." He tried

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to make his voice steady. "I've only killed one of them. It isn't enough."

Stephen grasped him harder. "All right, George. Keep your bubble level. This happens to me often. It will pass. One really can't do his best work at such moments . . . You know, we could both do with a drink."

George rubbed his forehead. He went over to the sideboard and poured Stephen a stiff one. He took another himself.

"Sorry again," he said. "I'm not doing too well tonight."

"You can still bowl for the Blues," Stephen said. "Let's get over to Woodstock. I've an idea we can persuade the fat boy to let us in."

"How about Philip? If they know about him, won't they?"

"Not so long as we've got Niki. He gives the orders. Matter of fact, if I know the pattern, they wouldn't do away with Philip here in the States. They'll get him behind their bloody Curtain somehow. But first things first. If we have luck in springing Tisza we might have a go at rescuing Philip and Michael, what?"

The hell with Michael, George thought. But he said, "Shouldn't we call in some help on this? The Federal men haven't shown much interest, but how about the police? It's a plain case of kidnaping."

Stephen shook his head. "We're kidnapers, too, old boy. What have we actually got on Svidirov? Not a bloody thing we could prove in court. Did you know he carries a diplomatic passport? He's accredited to the UN."

"We could keep him out of this."

"We're also car thieves, you know. A bit sticky to explain about the Cadillac, and it's all the blessed transport we've got at the moment. Finally, don't forget you've scrubbed a chap tonight. Your Jeep is near the spot. No reflection on you, George, but you probably didn't cover your tracks all that well. Some nosy shooting type with a keen dog might uncover the body first thing this morning. No, old boy, calling in the

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police is simply not on. We've got to put on this show all by ourselves."

"I suppose you're right. I'm not used to thinking of the police as being on the other side."

"I am," Stephen said drily. "Well, let's get cracking."

They herded the Russian back into the Cadillac and secured him. Stephen applied a gag, and George found an Army blanket to throw over him for concealment.

"We could do with another pistol," Stephen said. He had the P.38. The only hand gun George owned was a .22 revolver. Occasionally he used it to shoot rats in the barn. Might be better than nothing, he thought. He got it and put it in his pocket. Then something else occurred to him. He went back to the library and wrote a note for Mrs. Perley to relay to Bill Spurgis, saying he would be gone for another day or so on business and outlining complex arrangements for getting the Jeep, the Lancia, the Corvette, and Sooky back to Hanover. Let Bill figure out how they all got to Meriden.

Since he knew the road to Woodstock, George drove. It was almost four by the neon-lighted clock when they passed the West Lebanon Diner and turned right for the bridge to White River Junction, on the Vermont side. There was practically no traffic. Ten minutes later they had passed through White River, and Stephen spoke quietly.

"I don't care much for the car following us. Which is strange, because it's mine."

"Well, that's a switch. Who's chasing what? Where the hell did it come from? Are you sure it's the Lancia—in the dark?"

"I saw it under the lights, back in town. It's the Lancia, all right."

"It must have come up from Meriden and turned onto the bridge behind us."

Stephen fingered his pistol. "I suppose they'll have a go at us."

"When they spot this Cadillac, they'll think it's Niki."

"But they'll try to make contact."

George thought for a minute. "There shouldn't be more

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than one guy in that car," he said. "There were four yesterday, not counting Philip and Michael. We've taken care of two. That left two in the Meriden hide-out. When Niki and his chauffeur were overdue, one would go out on patrol to see what happened. He got as far as your car. He needed transportation. He got in and headed for Woodstock—reporting to GHQ."

Stephen nodded. "That makes sense. If you're right, one chap can't give us too much trouble on the road. But he could dirty up our visit to Woodstock. He'll get there on our tail—or even a jump ahead of us, if he knows how to push the Lancia. Shall we try to take him?"

"How?"

Stephen meditated briefly. "If we can get a decent lead, there's one way. It goes like this: We pull off the road beyond a turn. We pile out and stand in the road. When he comes round the corner we let him have it, head on. Shoot for his side of the windscreen. No good shooting at a car going away, but coming at you, you can't miss."

George grunted. "And what happens to us? We just get run over?"

"That's the point of the sharp turn, old boy. When the driver loses control—if all has gone well and the car is going fast enough—it spins out and away from you. Centrifugal force, you know—elementary law of physics."

George shook his head. "The Mad Magyar again. Can't you think of something a bit more sporting?"

"Well, we might let him take the lead." Stephen looked back. "He's closing on us now. If he isn't too good on the turns we could overtake him on the straight and ride him off the road. You know how it's done, don't you?"

"Now that's my boy. Something nice and conservative. We'll have a try." George pressed the pedal, and the big car surged ahead smoothly. "First I want enough lead to sneak off the road."

"We're leaving him," Stephen said, after a minute or so. "He's not competing."

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George observed that they were approaching the big parking space overlooking Quechee Gorge. While the Lancia was still out of sight behind the last curve, he drove deep into the graveled area and cut his lights. A few seconds later the little car flashed past. At once he had the Cadillac streaking after it, rear wheels spurting gravel.

Each time the road straightened, George narrowed the gap a little. But the man in the Lancia now appeared to realize that he was a fox ahead of hounds. He was using his advantage of superior steering and firmness on the turns.

"He knows a bit about driving," Stephen grunted. "But you're doing quite nicely with this behemoth. Like the *Queen Mary* taking after a frigate."

They were about two miles from Woodstock before George had the first good chance to make his play. The needle moved well past ninety-five and he was closing up fast. Then he heard a siren wail behind him and he glimpsed the reflection of a blinking red light in his mirror. For a moment he held his speed. But he knew the chase was over. How could he jockey another car off the road with a police cruiser on his tail? Fleetinglly he considered trying to outrun the police anyway, just to stay in the game. But that was no good either. They had a souped-up Chrysler 300, probably—too much, even for the Cadillac. In any case they'd be on the two-way radio and they'd have a road block ahead of him in no time. Swearing quietly, he slowed down and pulled off the road.

The cruiser turned in ahead of him and stopped, the red light on top still flashing. Two State troopers got out. One looked at the front plates while the other, the tall one, came up to George.

"Let me see your registration and operator's permit."

George fumbled in his wallet for his driver's license, thinking fast. The truth? Too incredible. Just shut up and take the rap? Not good enough. He wouldn't get by with a summons. With no registration certificate and no explanation, he'd end up in jail. A big bold lie was indicated, and he tried it.

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"That's a stolen car we were chasing, Officer," he said. "I just borrowed this one from—from Judge Stevens. Car ahead belongs to this gentlemen here. It was taken about midnight in White River, and we just heard—from a friend—he saw it on the Woodstock road. Judge Stevens was with us, and he—"

"Just a minute, mister. We haven't had a hot car call all night. When did you report it?"

"Well, we didn't have a chance—" George knew it wasn't any good. He tried the offensive. "But how long are you going to chat about it? That car's moving away fast."

"Keep your pants on. He won't get very far. There's another cruiser waiting for him in Woodstock."

"That was fast work, Officer. Congratulations. We'll come over in the morning and identify the car. In fact, Stephen, you can give him your registration now, can't you? Well, thanks a lot. We've got to get Judge Stevens' car back—"

"You're coming with us," the trooper said.

"But golly, we—Look, I know I was going pretty fast. But can't you just give me a ticket? I've got identification. I can straighten it out later in the day."

The trooper looked at him. "You were doing practically a hundred. Out-of-state car. No registration. You give me a phony story. And your breath don't smell too good to me, either. Mister, do you know when you're in trouble?"

George did. He knew how much trouble when the tall trooper flashed his light in back and jerked the blanket off Niki Svidirov.

"Lord love a duck! What have we got here?" The other trooper came up to look. "These guys are big time. Get your gun on them, Jack."

George found himself looking into the black hole of a .38 revolver. The moment of truth, he thought. But how long will it take them to check our story out? How long before they'll even listen to it?

"Get out, Buster," the tall trooper said. "Hands clasped on top of your head. Your pal, too—on this same side. Get around here in the headlights."

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When he and Stephen lined up on the shoulder of the road, George noticed the heavy guard rail behind them. He remembered the place. The view was irresistible to tourists—a drop of almost a thousand feet to the valley, to an abandoned railroad and the Ottauquechee River. The first hundred feet of the slope was rock fill, then the steep, wooded mountainside all the way down.

He made his decision quickly, seizing the instant when the tall trooper discovered the pistol in Stephen's pocket. Suddenly he twisted and dived head first over the guard rail. His face and right shoulder plowed into the loose crushed rock, but his momentum was hardly checked. It seemed minutes before his bruising fall was halted by vegetation; actually it could not have been more than two seconds. By the time the first shot followed him he was deep in scrub pine, half blinded and hurting all over. A flashlight beam was fingering the brush around him. He lay completely still, not even breathing. There were several more shots.

The light vanished. After a pause—they were undoubtedly putting the cuffs on Stephen—he heard feet crunching on the shoulder of the road above him, then the crackle of voices on the radio. They'd have a big spotlight on him in no time. He squirmed furiously down the slope. It needed little effort; he was sliding, almost falling, but his knees and hands were taking a bloody beating. Another few hundred feet and the overgrowth of hemlock and weed hardwoods became thicker and higher. He checked himself and lay still, breathing in short gasps. He lay there for minutes—until he heard a siren scream up on the highway. Almost immediately the slope far above him was lighted like a stage set, and he could see a trooper, a doll-size figure, working his way down the loose rock fill. George got to his feet.

The slope was leveling off a little. He started across the face of it, heading west, toward Woodstock. He moved as quietly as he could, but he moved fast. The next half hour would tell the story. Already the eastern sky behind him was showing streaks of light. An early-rising chickadee fluttered

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close and swore nastily at him. Except for that, the woods were quiet. His progress was slow through the thick young timber, and he was glad when he came to a dry stream bed. He followed it down hill, moving faster now. He knew this sort of country well; typical deer cover. Quaking aspen—popple, they called it locally—gray birch, some conifers, and speckled alder in the marshes lower down. But it had looked more peaceful and friendly when he was the hunter. Now he could understand how it felt to be the deer. At any instant a bullet might come crashing into his back from the underbrush. His shoulder muscles tightened involuntarily. Like a deer he stopped occasionally and stood motionless to listen for the faintest rustle.

As the slope continued to flatten out, the stream bed widened, then disappeared into a culvert under the old Woodstock Railroad line. He was now down almost to the level of the river. He scrambled up on the railroad embankment. The alder swamps on both sides of the track reflected the gray dawn. A white mist hung over the river to his right. The inch-to-a-mile map was still clear in his mind. The farmhouse he was looking for would be up in the hills about one mile northwest of Woodstock. He was still two miles or more east of the town. He knew he would have to pass through the main business district in order to find a bridge across the river.

Looking down, he saw that the knees of his flannel slacks were completely gone, showing areas of scraped skin imbedded with specks of rock. One sleeve of his tweed jacket was ripped almost entirely off at the shoulder. Under the jacket, the front of his pullover was filthy. He could imagine that his face looked pretty nasty too; it felt raw and swollen. But he considered himself lucky to have no bones broken and, so far as he could tell, no sprains or twisted muscles.

The principal contents of his pockets, he discovered, were intact: his wallet, a badly flattened pack of Old Golds, his lighter, a small pocket knife, and of course the pencil and notebook which were the tools of his trade. He still had the

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.22 revolver, undamaged. His wrist watch, however, was shattered.

He could be in a lot worse shape, he decided. He did not regret his impulsive jump, but it was too bad Stephen had been left holding the bag; however, he'd straighten that out eventually. His prospects of making contact with Tisza seemed reasonably good. He felt unaccountably cheerful, taking a silly pleasure in the rather childish thought that he didn't have to go to the office that day. With no very clear idea of what he was going to do when he got there, he set out along the railroad track toward Woodstock.

Before he had gone very far he came on a grade crossing. To his left the unimproved road crossed the swamp on a sort of causeway, then zigzagged up the mountainside, undoubtedly to join the main highway. On the other side of the track, to his right, the road continued for a hundred yards or so to the dooryard of an unpainted shack on the river's edge. It was apparently occupied; washing hung on the porch, Vermont fashion, and a battered pickup truck at least twenty years old stood near the broken gate. There was, of course, a television antenna.

At once George realized that he was standing at a critical point. He had not known of a road from the highway down here to the river. It was an unpleasant surprise. At any minute the police might be coming down that road and fanning out along the track. If he were still in the brush they'd have him boxed, and he wasn't too much better off where he was now. Ahead of him the railroad bed was straight and level, with swamps on both sides. Although the sky was overcast, full daylight had come and visibility was unlimited except where the fog still blanketed the river. George made up his mind and moved quickly toward the shack.

He picked his way through the damp clothes hanging on the porch and knocked on the door. In a few seconds a voice—young, male, and sleepy—answered.

"What the hell do you want?"

"I've been in an accident," George said. "My car rolled

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over up on the highway."

"Wait a minute. I'll get my pants on."

The door swung open and a boy of about eighteen came out. His blue jeans were skin tight and he had no hips at all. His bare chest and shoulders were sculpturesque. Tousled curly hair fell across his eyes. He gave George a crooked grin.

"God, you *are* in bad shape, Mac. Come on in the house."

George followed him into the single room. It was as cheerless as the outside of the shack, bare except for the television set, a couple of kitchen chairs, and a table. There was a rusty wood stove in one corner. Then he noticed a narrow bed in an alcove. It was occupied. He saw a blonde head, a pretty young face on the pillow. Wide blue eyes were staring at him.

"Whyn't you sit down?" the boy said.

George did, and took out his cigarettes.

"Got another one? I'm out, as usual."

George passed him the pack and held out his lighter.

"Me too?" The girl's voice was warm and husky with sleep.

"Daphne, you get your—you pile out of that bunk, hear? Make some coffee or something."

She giggled. "He'll have to turn around the other way."

"Aw hell, he ain't the fresh kind. Besides he's all bunged up. Sit still, mister."

George politely averted his eyes, but he couldn't help catching a glimpse of the essential Daphne as she got up and stretched, pulled on a shirt and stepped into jeans. If she was proud of that smooth young body, George thought, he couldn't blame her.

The boy dragged deep on his cigarette. "Outside of a cup of coffee and maybe a shot of lousy port wine—that's what we drink here—I don't know what I can do for you, mister. You can wash up, if you want to. I could run you into town in the pickup, but the State cops'll find your wreck in a hurry. They're probably up there now. I heard a sy-reen a while back."

"You want to sell that pickup?" George said suddenly.

The youth looked at him with narrow eyes. "What's this?"

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He put his tongue against his teeth and made a noise. "You wasn't in no wreck."

"Well, it was—I was with another guy's wife—"

George wasn't doing so well lately as an extemporaneous liar. The boy drawled out a rude word and gave him a sour grin. "You don't want to see them cops, do you? What are you—hot car man? Cadillac specialist, I bet. You was dressed for it."

George was startled. He could think of nothing better than going along with a story that was at least half true.

"You must have a crystal ball, son."

"Nope. But I can tell. I done time."

"For what?"

"Your racket. Lifted a chunk of iron. 'Twasn't a Caddy, though. Old Plymouth."

"OK.," George said. "You're a right guy, then. Give me a break, will you? The cops had me, all right. I took a dive over the guard rail up there and slid down the mountain. They'll be down here pretty soon."

"They'll be down here, that's for sure," the boy said bitterly. "Anything happens in Windsor County, they look me up. Sons of guns can't leave me alone. And you're going to be a big help to me."

"You've got to hide me out. I'll fix it up with you."

The boy looked doubtful. He got up and walked to the window. "O.K.," he said finally. "I hate cops." Television drama echoed in his tone. "I got a rowboat down there. Fog won't burn off the river for another two, three hours. There's an island out a little ways. You take the boat. Hide it in the brush when you get to the island. Then just sit tight."

"That gets me on the island. How do I get off?"

"You can see this shack after the fog goes out. I'll give you the sign."

The boy went out on the porch. The coffee smell was making George's stomach roll and his mouth water, but he got up to follow the boy. He took two cigarettes from his pack and tossed the rest on the table. He winked at Daphne.

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"Thanks, mister," she said, and winked back.

Ten minutes later he was rowing through the fog, trying hard to keep a straight course. A spit covered with alder brush emerged from the fog—part of the island, he supposed—and he pulled in behind it. As far as he could tell, the boat would be out of sight here. He tied up to an overhanging branch and jumped ashore. He crawled under low pine branches, settled himself on a bed of fallen needles, and was asleep almost at once.

CHAPTER NINE

WHEN GEORGE woke up, the fog had completely vanished. The sky was dull pewter, however—lowery, as they said in these parts—and he had no idea how long he had slept. Crawling to the river's edge, he was surprised to see how narrow was the channel separating the island from the shore where the shack stood. It had seemed twice as far when he was rowing in the fog.

There was nobody outside the shack. A haze of blue smoke hovered over the chimney. Then, as he watched, the boy came out on the porch and faced the island. He made a beckoning motion with his arm. George rose and acknowledged the signal. He went to the boat and untied it. Getting in, he took up the oars and pulled for the mainland. A few minutes later he was sitting inside the shack again.

"Were the cops here?" he asked.

"Yeah, they was here, all right." The boy looked disgusted. "I asked one of them who they was looking for, and you know what that cop says? He says 'You wouldn't know him,' he says. 'You don't bat in this guy's league.' Damn cops. They never let you be . . . Well, they're gone now. They come back up the railroad half an hour ago." He laughed harshly. "They wasn't happy . . . You getting in some sack time, huh? Hey, Daphne—heat up that coffee, will you? . . . You still want that pickup? How much you want to give?"

"Well, I haven't got a lot of cash with me. How about fifty? And you can have the truck back when I'm through with it."

"I'd have to get a hundred. Maybe it ain't worth that. But I don't know where I could get another rig for less."

"I could give you a check for the difference."

The boy laughed derisively. "Check from a hot-car artist? Like that bunk about me getting the heap back."

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Daphne poured three cups of coffee and put a can of evaporated milk on the table. "No more sugar," she said.

The boy reached out his arm and swung it around her waist. "What d'you mean, Sugar? You had too much?" He started to sing softly, "Sugar in the mornin', sugar in the night . . ." He broke off. "Tell you what I'll do," he told George. "That gun I seen in your coat pocket. Can I have a look at it?"

George handed him the revolver. "It's only a .22," he said, trying to sound knowledgeable. "No damn good for a job."

"Job, nothin'. It'll kill a 'coon, won't it? I could even drop a deer with it, if I hit him in the white spot. Daphne and me got to eat this winter. Give me fifty bucks and this heater."

George considered the proposition briefly. He had thought the little revolver might have its uses when he came up against Niki's goons. Also, he hadn't wanted to hand this youngster a tool for crime. But he could easily believe that the boy really needed a gun for hunting. And it was hunting in the old backwoods way—not for sport, but for meat. George resolved to see that the kid got a decent shotgun someday soon. And maybe a deer rifle too. It was obvious that he knew his way around in the woods.

"All right," he said. "It's a deal."

Half an hour later, when he had the pickup started, he turned to the boy. "Thanks a lot, son. After I cool off a little I'll look you up. I might be able to do something for you." And George meant it.

"Forget it, mister," the boy said. "I ain't looking at another bucket that don't belong to me. I had a bellyful of your racket. If I helped you out a little, it was just 'cause I still hate cops."

George crash-shifted into low gear and drove out of the yard. He had washed off the dirt and dried blood, and found surprisingly few marks on his face. His unshaven chin was in character with the truck and with his clothes. The boy had given him a battered old felt hat and a faded plaid flannel

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shirt, and, after a fashion, Daphne had even patched his trousers. He thought he had a pretty good chance of reaching Svidirov's place without getting picked up. After the sleep and the coffee he felt better than he had for a long time. He was even developing a general plan of attack.

George drove through Woodstock and through the business section, and, a few blocks farther on, he turned right and crossed the old bridge, then cut left toward West Woodstock. On the outskirts of town, near his final turn-off, he found what he was looking for—a shabby little service station with no customers in sight. An old man in a brown sweater leaned back in a captain's chair near the door. George drove in, and the old man got stiffly to his feet.

"Gauge ain't working," George said. "Try five."

The old man nodded. "Hell of a day," he said. "Hurricane coming, the radio says."

"We can live without that . . . Say, I'm looking for a place—I think it ought to be up that hill about a mile. They said it's all by itself—west side of the road. Know where I mean?"

The old man nodded again as he thrust a nozzle in the fuel tank. "Lydia Barnes' place. Like you say, a mile up that road. Big white house on your left. Stands alone on a hill. Not a tree or nothing within a quarter mile of it."

"This woman wanted me to pick up some stuff. She must be moving. House change hands lately?"

"Ain't been sold. Stood empty for years. Lyddy rented it out a few months back—fellow from New Hampshire . . . So Lyddy wants some more of them chairs, does she? What for? Antique season's over. She did pretty good last summer, I hear. Can't be many chairs left in that attic." The old man cackled. "She'll have to have some more of them antiques made down to Windsor."

George acknowledged the favorite local joke and probed a little deeper. "Well, I hope these New Hampshire folks don't object to letting me take the chairs. What kind of people are they?"

"Keep to themselves. He goes past here once in a while

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in a big sedan. Heavy-set man. We figure he's one of them professors over to Dartmouth. No, I wouldn't think they'd mind if Lyddy wanted some of her old chairs."

"Well, I hope they won't. Got an idea I wouldn't get paid for the job if I came back without the chairs."

"That's right. Speaking of money, that's a dollar fifty-seven you owe me."

George paid him and drove on up the hill toward the Barnes place. The grade was extremely steep, and his radiator was boiling before he saw the large white cube of a house well off the road to his left. As the old man had said, there was neither bush nor tree to break the severe lines of the house or the brown knoll on which it stood. There were no outbuildings. No machine or animal was in the yard. Used as he was to starkness in New England farmhouses, George thought this was going a little far, even for the Woodstock area. One note jarred—the antenna rising above the main chimney. It would pass for a small television rig, but George recognized it as the array for an amateur radio transmitter.

He drove his pickup around to the back door, got out, and knocked. He had been relieved to see that the Cadillac was not in the yard. Therefore Niki was probably not in the house; evidently he had not yet talked his way out of the magistrate's court. No one else was likely to recognize him. He repeated his knock. When the door opened, a slim woman of about thirty-five stood before him. Her hair was drawn severely back; her features were clear and regular. She was dressed as for an afternoon party at home, but not in the New England manner.

"Came for the chairs, ma'am," he said.

"You came for what chairs, sir?" Her voice was precise and almost without accent.

"Lydia Barnes sent me. She wants some more of those chairs out of the attic."

"There was no arrangement that chairs should be removed."

"Well, I don't know anything about it, ma'am. She told

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me to pick up some old chairs in the attic." George took a gamble. "Maybe you could call her up."

The woman looked at him for a moment. "It is not necessary to disturb Miss Barnes. If there are chairs which my husband and I are not needing, she may have them. You will please follow me, sir."

She led him through the bare kitchen and up a narrow back stairs. On the second floor he caught a glimpse of a hall running toward the front of the house, the dark boards dully reflecting light from a window at each end. All the doors along both sides of the hall were closed. It was like a deserted corridor in a small hotel.

The attic was crowded with domed trunks, boxes, books, and hodgepodge of an old house long lived-in—a tarnished baritone horn, a marble-pillared clock, a lamp of many-colored glass. Fortunately, there were half a dozen lyre-back chairs.

"I guess these are them," George said.

"I see no reason that these should not be taken."

One at a time George took five of them down the steep staircases and put them in his truck. His senses were alert for any evidence of Tisza's presence in the house and for the opportunity to explore further, but on each trip the woman accompanied him both ways. Going back to pick up the last chair, he stopped on the second floor. He did not have to be much of an actor to emphasize his heavy breathing a little.

"I'm sorry, ma'am. I have to rest a minute. My heart ain't what it should be."

She hesitated only a moment. "I shall carry the last chair down for you."

"Oh, I couldn't let you do that. They're pretty dusty. Just give me a minute and I'll be all right. By the way, I see your husband's a ham."

"He is what?"

"Radio amateur. My brother's got a rig. Lives down in Worcester, Mass. Maybe he'd like to work your husband some time. What's his call?"

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"That I cannot say. I pay little attention to my husband's amusement."

"Well, I wish he was home. I'm interested in ham radio myself. Maybe he'd let me see his shack."

"Unfortunately, he is not at home. Now I must ask you, if you have rested, to finish your work. I am expecting guests."

They moved up to the attic, and George shrank from the thing he had to do. But he thought of Tisza and he did it. Without warning he dived at the woman's knees and brought her crashing to the dusty floor. At once he seized her skirt by the hem and pulled it up over her head. She fought like a cat, scratching and twisting; her strength amazed him. Once her knee caught him in the stomach, and he hissed in his breath with pain. He had to end the ridiculous wrestling match.

But the woman would not quit. Any lifting of his full weight from her body brought her knees thrusting up at him. He would have to apply force or violence. Her lean jaw was outlined under the thin cloth. He drew back his right fist and hit her precisely on the button.

That did it. Feeling a strange embarrassment, he drew her skirt down over her legs. Her face was pale and her eyes closed, but she was breathing normally. George found some sheets in a trunk, ripped them, and bound the woman in a sitting position to the last of the lyre-back chairs. Her eyes opened as he finished the job.

"I am truly sorry this was necessary," he told her. "I hope your people didn't have to get quite so rough with Tisza Swan."

She glared at him. "*Sturmabteilung!* Our methods are nothing so bestial as yours."

"Where is she?"

The woman spat in his face. It was no good wasting time with her, he decided. The attic door had a key in it, and he turned the lock. Down one flight, he moved rapidly along the second-floor hall, trying doors and calling Tisza's name. One after another, the doors flew open on empty rooms. Again he

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had the sense of nightmare. He came to a locked door and pounded on it. When he got no response he stepped back and then threw his weight against it as he turned the knob. There was a sound of ripping wood and the dead-bolt gave. Inside the room were several wooden boxes packed with dismantled radio gear—nothing more.

The next door was locked too. The first time he lunged it resisted. He smashed his shoulder into it again and it opened. Tisza was sitting up in a bed blinking sleepily at him. Her yellow hair was disheveled. She was wearing the gray wool suit she had had on when he last saw her. That seemed like weeks ago, but he realized it was less than twenty-four hours.

"*Gyorgy, hol van a—*" she said, then smiled. "I am sorry—I wake up in Hungarian. Now I find the English. Where are we? Do I fall asleep in your car? I do not remember even that you are coming out from the forest."

George went over and took her hands. "Tisza, dear, we'll talk about it later. Come on—we've got to get out of here. Are you all right?"

"I think so. The shoulder have one small point of pain, but—"

"Never mind, darling." Hypodermic, he thought. She probably never even saw Niki come up behind her. He helped her out of bed and she stood up steadily enough. Taking her hand he hurried her out of the room and led her down the stairs. They were crossing the kitchen when the back door swung open.

Niki Svidirov was almost elegant in his black Homburg and Chesterfield topcoat. Like an old-time gang leader he had two goons behind him. One was young, with eager, burning eyes. The other was squat, middle-aged, and phlegmatic. They had pistols in their hands. The big Russian's expression did not change when he saw George and Tisza. He made no sudden movement, but he shouted a word or two. Then he stepped behind George and patted his clothing expertly. The knife and the lighter were removed from his pockets.

"I think you had a gun, Mr. Farrell. I do not find it."

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George said nothing. Svidirov's excellent English had taken him by surprise.

"There is no reason that you should not co-operate in these small matters. You will not be mistreated unless you act foolishly."

"I haven't got the gun now," George said.

"I trust you have not disposed of Shura also, Mr. Farrell. You and your friends seem inclined toward unnecessary violence."

"She's all right. She's in the attic."

Svidirov spoke in Hungarian to the older goon. The man moved up the stairs. A few moments later the woman came down. Apparently for George's benefit, she spoke in English.

"This man has assaulted me," she said, looking at him. "I do not mean sexually. But he applied force."

Svidirov's eyes squinted with amusement. "I cannot understand how Mr. Farrell found it possible to resist you, Shura." Suddenly his grin disappeared. "Nor can I understand why you allowed yourself to be taken by surprise." He turned again to George, with a man-of-the-world air. "You must have a poor opinion of my associates. Perhaps also of me. There has been much bungling throughout this operation. I am working with inadequately trained personnel, you understand, which tends to make one careless of his own technique. But I think matters have now arranged themselves satisfactorily." He looked shrewdly at George. "If I may say so, your own work has not been impeccable, has it? The matter of the Cadillac's registration certificate—well, there are a number of interesting points which I shall enjoy discussing with you, now that the affair is practically over. It is always a pleasure to meet a professional colleague under the circumstances now existing."

What does he mean, "professional colleague," George thought. Who does he think I am? But he said nothing. Svidirov apparently wanted to do the talking.

"We have perhaps twenty minutes here," the Russian went on. "Let us make ourselves comfortable. Shura will pre-

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pare some hot tea with rum." He grinned wisely. "But you would prefer bourbon whiskey. I apologize that I do not have it. But surely Miss Swan has enjoyed *teo-rummal* in her own country?"

He removed his hat and led the way into a cold and dusty living room. George and Tisza followed him. The goons took their posts in the hall and Shura remained in the kitchen.

Svidirov's gentleman-villain manner was contagious, and George found himself framing his own speech in the same style.

"I regret that my own hospitality was inferior to yours, Colonel Svidirov," he said. The title had slipped itself in for no good reason—part of the silly theatrics—but the Russian looked at him sharply. "Perhaps," George went on, "you would tell me what happened to you and my friend after I left you."

Svidirov laughed easily. "May I say in the first place that I cannot understand why you found it necessary to escape from your own police. But you can explain that to me later." He offered cigarettes and leaned back in his chair. He was overplaying somewhat his role as the worldly and genial host. George could only conclude that his ego had been damaged and this cat-and-mouse business was his way of rebuilding it. It was futile, George thought, to expect any sort of courtesy indefinitely. In any case, he would have preferred to see the hole card at once. But with Tisza there, he was not willing to precipitate trouble.

"Myself, I had little difficulty in making my position clear," Svidirov said, blowing out a cloud of smoke. "I had the documents I needed—and a call to the United Nations secretariat was enough verification. Amusingly enough, the night duty officer at the United Nations was one of my countrymen."

George heard a heavy engine laboring outside—a truck, probably. Svidirov paid it no attention. The goons left the hall and their footsteps echoed on the stairs. Tisza looked

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at George, but he could only shrug slightly. The Russian went on talking.

"You see, what had happened was this—and I think you can appreciate the invention. Not bad, for—what do you say? —'off the cuff?'" His eyes narrowed shrewdly. "In any case, it succeeded better than the version which you offered the policeman. According to my story, the little Italian car was stopped by the road. You and two Hungarian gentlemen were standing beside it. I came along in my Cadillac and generously offered to take you to Woodstock. You and Mr. Szabo-Lewis came with me, the other one stayed with the disabled car. But we had gone only a few miles when the Italian car passed us. You then drew a pistol and forced me to stop. You bound me and gagged me. It was quite a flagrant case of armed robbery. I was released, and my car was of course returned to me."

Now the noise in the hall indicated that something heavy was being carried downstairs and taken outdoors. It occurred to George that it was the boxed radio equipment. Shura came in with the tea. There was also a plate of open-face sandwiches. George hoped he did not look starved as he reached toward them.

"As for Mr. Szabo-Lewis, I'm afraid he finds himself in a difficult position," Svidirov was saying. "He faces charges of kidnaping, auto theft, and carrying a concealed firearm. Of course he will eventually be allowed to communicate with the FBI, but I do not think that will help him so long as you are not present to verify his story. And you will not be present, will you?"

Svidirov paused to finish his rum-laced tea. He was evidently enjoying himself. "I also have a few questions to ask you, Mr. Farrell—if that is your name, although I do not think it is. I do not think you are Major Farrell's brother, as Szabo-Lewis told the police. You are perhaps Nichols. We have admired his work for a long time, but, frankly, we have never identified him positively. We now know he worked closely

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with Allen Connelly in Hungary. If you are Nichols, you will be happy to see Mr. Connelly again very soon."

George was impatient. Whatever was coming, he wanted it out in the open. "I don't suppose you'll believe me, and I don't know that it makes any difference," he said, "but my name does happen to be George Farrell. Philip is my brother. And I never heard of Allen Connelly in my life."

Svidirov grinned at him. "Well, these questions can be discussed later. Now I have arranged transportation for you and Miss Swan—who has undoubtedly heard of Mr. Connelly. I believe it has arrived now. But please finish you tea. And do take that last sandwich, Mr.—Farrell."

"Do you mind telling me where we're going?"

Svidirov looked a little impatient too, but he did not seem ready to abandon his act entirely. "Mr. Farrell, you are familiar with those T.V. programs in which the fortunate contestants are showered with gifts? Interesting examples of capitalist *mores*. A trip abroad is often included. Now, Mr. Farrell, and Miss Swan, we are going to put you aboard a luxurious ocean steamer and we are sending you to a lovely, tropical Central American country. And that is not all. From there you will embark on a voyage which will take you to—another place."

He was tired of the silly game at last, and his smile vanished. He shouted at the goons in Hungarian. Tisza looked at George.

"He is saying we are to be placed in such a—a—I do not know in English—large closed truck."

They were taken outside.

Backed up against the porch was a padded van of the type used for a long-distance furniture moving. A new man—he looked like an American and was apparently the truck-driver—held a light submachine gun so as to cover the open doors in the rear. The truck body screened him from the road. Svidirov motioned George into the van. As he scrambled in, he saw Philip and an older man—undoubtedly Michael Swan—standing in the dark interior. The wooden boxes were also in-

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inside. George exchanged a quick, rueful grin with his brother and turned to help Tisza. The doors were slammed shut and he heard the click of a heavy padlock closing. The darkness was total.

"Don't anybody talk yet. Just listen. Remember everything you hear." It was a harsh whisper from Philip.

The outside noises, muffled by the padding, had little meaning to George. He heard the driver get up behind the wheel, and he thought someone got in on the other side. That was to be expected, anyway. He could deduce nothing else from the murmur of voices, a slamming door, and the sound of another vehicle moving away on the gravel. He guessed it was about fifteen minutes, maybe less, from the time the doors were closed until the engine started and they lurched off.

He felt a groping hand. "George, here," he said. "Who's that?"

"Phil." The voice was close to his ear. "That was the Woodstock place, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Let's try to keep oriented as long as we can. You know this part of the country. Where can they go from here?"

"In Woodstock they'll probably either turn east toward White River Junction or west toward Rutland. Depends on whether they're headed for Boston or New York."

"Why either one?"

"We're going for a boat ride, according to Svidirov—Central America. Then behind the Curtain, I guess."

He heard Philip's soft whistle. After a moment his brother spoke again.

"Niki can't resist gloating when he's ahead—like a lot of them. One of us will have to shake loose. It's our only chance. Alert our people, and—"

"Why can't we all make the break together?"

"It just doesn't work out that way, Georgie. These things have to be arranged—laid on, as the British say. Like an escape from a PW camp. Those inside have to set up the play for the one who breaks out."

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"Well, then, who does it? You? This guy Swan?"

"We'll have to think about that. Whoever has the best chance to get through and pass the word. Not Tisza, I think. Maybe me. Maybe you. Maybe Allen."

"Who the hell is Allen?"

Philip grunted. "Wait a minute," he said. "Quite a bit of traffic outside. Woodstock? Which way are they turning? Listen."

George concentrated on the movement of the van. He sat limp and allowed his body to swing with the turn.

"West," he said. "Rutland."

"O. K. How do you figure the route to New York?"

"Let's see . . . I'm driving a big truck. Well, U.S. 4 all the way to the Albany area, New York Thruway south, New Jersey 17 at the line, Hard to tell from there. Most of the banana-boat piers are East River, down near the Battery."

"How long will it take?"

George figured rapidly. Three hundred miles. Average, maybe almost forty—if they use the Thruway and run non-stop. "Around eight hours."

"It's just about noon now. They ought to let us out for a few minutes somewhere—natural necessity, at least. If they do that, try to figure about where we are. I might be important. Now I've got to have a word with Allen."

"Look, Phil," George said. "Again: Who the hell is Allen?"

His brother said nothing for a moment. Then he spoke.

"The guy you call Michael Swan. That's Allen Connelly. One of the best men in the business—at least on our side."

"Is Tisza really his daughter?"

"Sure."

"All right. Just one more thing. When did Niki figure you? Did my messing around have anything to do with it?"

"Not a thing in the world, Georgie. We'd planned the meet with an AVH type who was going to pick us up in New York later that night. But Niki's Russians decided to take over the operation and they sure as hell crossed us up. I'll tell you more about it after a while."

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Philip eased away. George heard him speaking to Swan—to Connelly—and he heard a quiet answer. Before that, while he and Philip were talking he had heard Connelly and Tisza murmuring together in Hungarian.

Someone else was moving close to him now, and he knew Tisza's faint perfume. He found her hand and held it.

"Why didn't you tell me something about yourself, Tisza Connelly?" he said.

"Nothing to tell." Her voice was low. "I know always my father is American. Formerly it is not interesting to you. But now I wish you to know all from me."

George found her head on his chest. His pulse quickened. He pressed his face lightly into her hair. The muffled whine of tires and gears muted their voices. During the next hour or so he learned many things about Tisza.

CHAPTER TEN

ALLEN MICHAEL CONNELLY was born in Boston near the beginning of the century. His mother, Maria Szomoryi, was a Hungarian, a light-opera singer of good family who had visited America on tour and remained to become the wife of a wealthy Irish-born contractor named Michael Joseph Connelly. Young Allen Connelly was a sophomore at Harvard when his father died, and he remained there to graduate. His mother, however, returned to Europe as soon as the will was probated.

Allen Connelly had learned the Hungarian language from his mother in infancy, and at Harvard he immersed himself in its rich literature. After receiving his bachelor's degree, he joined his mother abroad.

In 1925 he published his dissertation for the doctorate. As a direct result he was offered and accepted an assistant professorship at the University of Budapest. Two years later he married one of his graduate students, the Countess Ilona Hattyu, and added her name to his own as was often done in Central Europe when the wife came from such a distinguished family.

Erzsabet Connelly-Hattyu was born in 1933. From her earliest years she regarded her father as Hungarian, although she had been told that he was originally from America. English was not spoken in their home, and their family life was different in no special way from that of their friends.

The onset of war in 1939 did not affect the family very seriously at first. The Hungarians, although nominally allied to Germany, held a rather cynical attitude toward the power struggle of larger and younger nations. The rich Hungarian plain continued to produce food in plenty; grapes still ripened on the terraces of Eger and the Balaton. The little girl missed her father bitterly, of course, when he disappeared in December of 1949. Her mother explained the situation as well as she could to the nine-year-old child.

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Connelly-Hattyu had never given up his American citizenship. What tenuous roots still bound him to his native country, his wife could not say. Perhaps his decision to leave Hungary when the United States entered the war against the Axis derived more from his personal hatred of Nazi ideology than from patriotic motives. His wife knew that he held no illusions concerning rule by terror and stultification of the spirit. And he was completely aware that these things are eventually inseparable from any form of materialistic socialism. Accordingly, the Countess found it hard to explain, even to herself, why her husband had set out alone in his car one dark winter night for the Russian border.

Three years later, the horror and the reality of war had come at last to Budapest. German troops garrisoned the city; thousands of Jews were rounded up to be killed or shipped to the west . . . then the Russians came. Along with them came the Moscow-trained core of a Hungarian Communist government—including Michael Connelly-Hattyu.

But he arrived in Budapest too late to protect his wife from some of his associates. The day before he got there, while Tisza was visiting her grandmother, a group of Soviet officers decided to have a small party at the Hattyu house. They trooped in from the street, already more than half drunk, and ordered wine. They demanded that the Countess play the piano.

The room was chilly and they started a fire, feeding it with her husband's books. Exactly what happened then was never known, but there was a disturbance in the room, and some shooting. The draperies apparently caught fire and the whole place was soon in flames. The Russians staggered out but the Countess did not. Her husband found her body—what was left of it—in the charred shell next morning.

Then Michael Connelly-Hattyu and his daughter entered on a very strange sort of life. Although he had seemed at first to be a trusted member of the dominant Moscow group in the Hungarian Communist Party, he resumed his chair in the history department of the University. He and Tisza were es-

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established in a flat overlooking the Danube on the Szechenyi Rakpart. It was comfortable and even luxurious by post-war standards. Now his associations seemed to be mostly with the American and British officers of the Allied Control Commission. He attended their parties at the Park Club and often took them on shooting trips. As Tisza grew older she occasionally went along, and was very popular with the Anglo-American military group. After the Peace Treaty was ratified and the Hungarian nation regained its sovereignty—under strict Russian supervision—Connelly-Hattyu's cordial relations with the Westerners continued.

At first, Tisza could not understand her father's position. She had learned early that very few Hungarians had anything but hatred and contempt for their Russian masters, although many had joined the Party to save their jobs and their lives. All Hungary looked to the West for eventual salvation. Accordingly, it would be straightforward enough if her father were simply a courageous man, American born, whose sympathies were naturally and openly anti-Communist, despite (or perhaps because of) his wartime sojourn in Moscow. But she could not believe that. One incident, particularly, remained vivid in her memory.

About a month after her mother's death, Tisza had awakened late at night. She heard her father talking quietly to someone in a front room of the flat. Conscious of her responsibility as his hostess, she slipped into her school uniform, ran a comb through her hair, and prepared to make an appearance, to offer the hospitality of the house as she knew her mother would have done. But she stopped short as she entered the living room. Her father was speaking Russian. She had never heard him do that. A man in civilian clothes sat across the table, his face in shadow.

When her father saw her, there was an amused question in his greeting. He introduced her in Hungarian, but did not mention the stranger's name. The man smiled without speaking. He had a rather small beard, like a physician. Her father told her they did not care for *palinka* or coffee. Murmuring

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the polite formula of departure, Tisza went back to bed. She did not go to sleep for a long time. The stranger's name had not been mentioned, but his face was well known to her from Party banners. He was Marshal Klimenty Voroshilov, commander-in-chief of the Soviet Occupation Forces.

A few others, members of the old aristocracy, for the most part, continued to live in almost open defiance of the regime. The Szabo-Lewis family was one example—young Istvan had had to escape to England, crossing the Austro-Hungarian border at night just ahead of a security-police detachment. But there was a substantial difference between her father and these. They lived a hunted life, with no fixed residence and no visible means of support. Normally they kept to the remote rural districts. Michael Connelly-Hattyu, on the other hand, was an honored member of the University faculty. He drove a car and lived at a very good address. To Tisza, the conclusion was inescapable: he enjoyed a considerable measure of Russian protection.

Tisza was almost sixteen when the Communists arrested the Prince Primate, Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty. He was the great national hero, the public defier of both Nazi cruelty and Communist terror. After his trial and condemnation, Tisza came to a decision. She made up her mind to join those who were working secretly for liberation.

Tisza was fairly sophisticated in matters of intrigue and espionage. At sixteen she had no doubt that her father was a double agent. But she could not be sure which side had his ultimate loyalty. He had never spoken of these matters. Before she committed herself to resistance activity she had to find out. The knowledge would not change her decision, but it would certainly affect her conduct.

It was on a Sunday in September that she and her father drove to Lake Balaton for a day's outing.

Haze hung over the far shore of the enormous lake. It was the first time either of them had visited the Balaton for several years, and their mood was nostalgic.

"The lake and countryside are lovely as they have always

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been in September," Michael said. He looked up and blinked his eyes against the sun. "If your mother were here with us it would be possible to imagine that war had never come to our Pannonia." The silence was long.

"The enemy is the same for all who seek to follow the way of Christ Jesus," he said. "The enemy is the devil of arrogance, of intellectual pride, of lust for power. Since Lucifer was cast down from heaven he has had many names and has found many dwelling places. Wherever he goes he brings hell with him."

That, Tisza knew, was her answer. There could be no further doubt concerning her father's position. She knew now that he had been risking his life every minute of every day for four years—an American agent posing as a spy for the Soviet Union. The realization struck her like a blow. Tears came to Tisza's eyes, but she smiled at her father.

"Then once again Lucifer must be driven out of Paradise," she said huskily.

For seven years Tisza worked in the resistance movement. Her strong preference was to go underground, to participate in the active operations of the anti-Communist Brotherhood—espionage near Soviet military installations, courier service on the black route to and from Vienna, the warning network and its associated escape channels, sabotage in the factories of Csepel Island and Ujpest, occasional dynamite jobs on the railway into the Soviet Union. Her orders, however, were for quite another phase of the Brotherhood's work. She was instructed to join the Party. As a student in the gymnasium and later at the University she was to seek leadership in the principal Communist youth organization—the DISZ. Tisza did her job well. By the time she had her diploma she was a member of the DISZ central directorate.

The Brotherhood had appreciated, quite correctly as it turned out, that the revolution must spring eventually from a split in the Communist Front itself—pro-Hungarian Communists against pro-Russians Communists. It was expected

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that the latter would be a small minority. The job of the Brotherhood's agents within the Party was to see that the cleavage, when it came, would be violent and irreparable; that no peace-making overtures would make headway, that the conflagration would spread and explode in a popular uprising. Then, it was felt, the Western allies would no longer withhold the support which would guarantee liberation. The Brotherhood were convinced that the eventual outcome would leave no room for a Marxian toehold of any sort, whether socialist, Trotskyite, or some variation of Titoism. The Hungarian people had had their fill of Red pie in the sky, however exotic the flavor.

In the autumn of 1956 the Brotherhood decided that the time was right to make their move. After the Austrian State Treaty had been ratified and Soviet forces no longer garrisoned Hungary's western neighbor. This action, in accordance with the Hungarian Peace Treaty which had been signed almost ten years before, should have been the signal for withdrawal of Russian troops, but to the surprise of no one really familiar with Soviet aims, the withdrawal did not take place. Now the Hungarians, always intensely nationalistic, were growing restive in their increasingly clear status as permanent slaves of the Russians. When the Poles succeeded by threat of revolution to win a few concessions from their Russian masters, it was evident that the moment for action in Hungary had arrived.

Meetings of intellectuals began to spark with the accumulating voltage. Open argument was heard against repressive Government policies. The only thing needed was a shout from the gallery—*down with the Russian Occupation*. The Brotherhood saw to it that the shout was forthcoming, and that it was echoed immediately from every quarter of Budapest. The workers on Csepel Island caught the fever within minutes after the students at the University had drafted their first bill of grievances. Soon a hundred thousand people had assembled in Parliament Square, under the line-of-metal of Russian tanks. Hungarian security police—the

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AVH—mounted their machine-guns on the roofs of the Parliament building. For no apparent reason the AVH men fired a burst into the crowd. The revolution was on.

To Tisza Connelly-Hattyu the next three weeks left few clear and continuous memories of anything other than the clatter of small-arms fire, squeal and groan of tank treads, sudden orange clouds from benzine grenades, bodies sprawled on piles of paving blocks or in bullet-spattered rooms. A satisfying number of those bodies had been members of the AVH.

But after the arrest of Imre Nagy, when Russian treachery and tanks had broken the back of the revolution, when Free Hungary had been talked to death in the United Nations, a message reached her in an abandoned house in the western part of the city. The bearer was Istvan Szabo-Lewis, who had returned to Hungary from England and who had fought beside her in the Apponyi Ter and in front of the Kilian Barracks.

"Michael is going out tonight," he said. "He asks that you will go with him. If you do not choose to go West you will certainly be taken East. The freedom fighters are being rounded up by the hundreds. There are boxcars waiting at the East station, and they are filling rapidly. The Muscovites are searching from house to house. Every person discovered with a firearm in his possession will be put aboard the train. Believe me, Tisza dear, the revolution is finished."

The girl gestured wearily. "What is there for us in the West? I cannot bear more of their empty and endless talk. There are no anti-Communists in the West—only in the Communist countries."

"I think you are incorrect, dear Tisza. There are a few in the West who truly understand that Communism lives only by the expansion of terror. They are not the wide-mouthed men in government, in the universities, the pulpits, and the other places where a career is made by continuous talk. But there is, for instance, one American I know who hates this evil as you and I do. He is working tirelessly for its destruc-

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tion. Tonight he leaves Budapest for Vienna, under the protection of a diplomatic passport. He also has green dollars and several bottles of whiskey. Accordingly, it will not be difficult for him to arrange that you, Michael, and I shall accompany him."

"Who is this man and why does he do this for us?"

"Your father has been of some service to him and to his predecessor. Perhaps I have, also. He was an attaché of the American Legation. His name is Philip Farrell."

Tisza rose slowly from her chair. She removed her red-white-and-green armband. She lifted the neck strap of a Russian machine pistol over her head and laid the weapon on a bare table. She smiled wryly.

"There was no more ammunition anyway," she said.

Together they walked out into the empty street and turned west.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AFTER Tisza finished her story, she and George were silent for a long time. "You know, Tisza," he said at last, "I wish I had your combat record. You can be proud of it."

"But you were in the war, no?"

"I was in it, all right. But it wasn't as rugged as yours. It wasn't in my own country, my own city."

"I hope I'm not interrupting." Philip's voice sounded close to his ear. "If you two aren't otherwise occupied, Allen wants to brief you. How about coming back near the tail gate? There's less rumble, and the driver won't hear us. We've checked back there. It isn't bugged."

They crawled to the rear and grouped themselves around the man whom Philip called Allen Connelly. George still thought of him as Michael, as Tisza's father.

"I think Philip and I have developed a course of action which might be acceptable." Michael said. His speech was precise and somewhat tutorial. "Perhaps it embodies our most promising opportunity. I hope Mr. Farrell — George — will agree."

"I'm easy to get along with," he said.

"The part you may have to play, however, will not be easy. Philip and I think you should make the break."

"Well—?"

"I had better outline the scheme. You see, we have been en route almost four hours. It seems likely that there will be a halt for refueling. Possibly the doors will be opened, in order that our keepers may observe how we are faring. We cannot allow such an opportunity to pass. We think, George, that you will be in the best position to exploit it. Although we have left your familiar country behind, we are still in a region which you know in a general way. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, I suppose it is. What do you want me to do?"

"Just one thing. You must reach a telephone. I shall give

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you a number in New York to call. I think this van can be intercepted within an hour after your call. In any case, no ship will leave an Atlantic port with us aboard."

"All right. But how do I shake loose without getting shot?"

"There is a standard technique which should be good enough—what Philip calls the rhubarb. If the opportunity offers, Philip and I shall do our best to create one. We shall attack one another violently. There should be an interval of approximately two seconds during which our guards will do nothing at all. That is the normal reaction time under such circumstances. It should provide you with the opportunity to take cover from the guard's—ah—chopper. Then you will disappear."

"Lord! That sounds like one of Stephen's Mad Magyar brainstorm. Somebody's asking for a bellyful of slugs."

"That is always a possibility. It is in fact an occupational hazard in the business. Unfortunately, no better device appears to be available. Our time is short and our means limited. We must not let any opportunity slip to take the initiative."

"One more question," he said. "Why should these goons drive on to New York after I get away—if I do. They'll know I'm going to blow the whistle on them. Won't they just say, The hell with it? They could—knock you three off, ditch the van, and move out of the country."

"That's—" Philip started to say something, but Michael cut in.

"They will follow their instructions to the letter, in so far as that is possible. They are not permitted to improvise. It's another slight advantage we have."

"Well, I'll do whatever I can," George said. "It's a good thing I've had a little experience in the past couple of days."

"Excellent. There is no really adequate substitute for experience in these matters. Now one thing more. We can't foresee the exact situation we shall face when the doors are opened. It's quite possible that our scheme will prove entirely unrealistic. We must be able to cancel the whole operation."

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"You're calling the signals, Allen," Philip said.

"All right. But George will have to give the word if conditions are not promising from his point of view—if the country is too open to provide concealment, for example . . . I think that's all I have, except that telephone number." He gave them a downtown exchange followed by the same digit repeated five times.

It was while Michael was outlining his scheme that George had first noticed the peculiar behavior of the van. Although it seemed to be moving at very good speed—undoubtedly on the New York Thruway—its momentum was checked at irregular intervals, as if by erratic application of the brakes. After three or four such setbacks, he realized what was happening. They were bucking a strong and gusty head wind.

He remembered the old man at the Woodstock service station saying something about a hurricane advisory. The noise level had increased noticeably inside the van; the whine of the big tires underneath them had taken on a high, cutting overtone, as if slicing through sheeted water on the highway. Even through the heavy padding George could now hear rain slashing the sides of the van in vicious, repeated lashings.

They huddled together to discuss how the storm might affect their chances of escaping. "In any case, it's going to delay us by hours," George said. "Maybe we'll miss the boat."

"The boat will wait for us. Undoubtedly its movements are controlled by the Russians." Michael seemed to speak from knowledge of such matters. "Our best hope is that the delay will extend itself enough to make a stopover necessary before we get to New York."

"We just might do better than that," George said. "That stopover could be more or less permanent. Have you ever seen a hurricane in this part of the country when it really takes off the wraps? The last big one was Diane, in 1955. If this one develops along those lines there'll be floods, trees across the highways, wires down, abandoned cars—awful mess. No traffic can move in it. The State Police will set up road blocks, and our friends in the front office might have to ditch this

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truck almost anywhere. Sooner or later somebody ought to come along and get us out."

"Are we doing nothing better but hope for this?" Tisza said. "It should be an action more positive."

"I suppose we've all been thinking that," Philip said. "We haven't much to work with—not even a pocket knife. I've tried ripping this damn padding so we could at least bang out a signal, but it's no go. If we could force those doors open, we could all drop off the tailgate in this storm and probably get away with it. But we've got to have some kind of a tool."

George thought suddenly of the boxed radio equipment. Wouldn't tools be packed with it? It seemed likely that the screwdrivers and wrenches used to dismantle the relay racks would be put in one of the boxes before the lid was nailed down. The problem of removing a lid, of course, was pretty hopeless. He didn't want to mention his idea to the others and then have to disappoint them.

"I'm going to take a look at something up front," he said, and worked his way forward to the boxes. He selected the one that seemed to have been loaded last. His fingers soon told him that the top was secured by flat-head screws countersunk in the wood, and he had an upsurge of hope. He found a dime in his pocket and went to work. It was not long before he had the top off and was exploring inside with his hands. Wedged between a component chassis and one side of the box George found a fat canvas roll.

The tool kit was more complete than he had dared to hope. The principal items were a medium-sized screwdriver, an adjustable wrench, a **push drill** with bits in the handle, a thin keyhole saw, and an **electrician's knife**. The other stuff was too small to be useful—delicate screwdrivers, hex-nut drivers, needle-nose pliers. At Philip's suggestion they put the tools they wanted in their pockets, returned the others to the box, and screwed down the lid.

The violence of the storm had increased. The truck was barely moving—no doubt the driver was up against almost zero visibility—and the wind was rocking the body like a ship

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in heavy seas. The roar of the hurricane made it hard to hear anybody speaking inside the van.

"If we can force the door we've got it made," Philip shouted. "The truck is practically standing still. Wonderful weather for a jail break."

Using the knife and the screwdriver, they explored the construction of the doors, under the padding. But the hinges were mounted on the outside, with no bolts projecting through. The slot where the two doors met was covered by a metal astragal.

It was bitterly discouraging, after their luck in finding the tools, and George's throat tightened with despair. He was painfully thirsty, and he wanted a cigarette so bad that the roof of his mouth ached. But the others were no better off, he knew, and he smothered the whimpering of self-pity.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE TRUCK HAD NOW come to a full stop, but the body still lurched in the heavy wind. "Pulled off on the shoulder, I guess," George said to Philip. "Probably can't see a thing with the rain flooding his windshield."

Then the truck was rolling forward again, slowly, and the floor seemed to incline steeply downward. Soon it was jolting along on the level in one of the lower gears, and George could hear water splashing irregularly on the road beneath them. Apparently it was a road cratered with potholes.

"They've left the Thruway," he said. "Damn it, that stop was the exit toll gate."

"Where do you suppose we are?"

"Hard to figure. Their speed's been pretty much cut down. When the storm started I'd guess we might have been thirty miles south of Albany. Haven't gone far since then. No towns right on the Thruway—they're a couple of miles east of it—but just as reference points I'd say we're about half way between Catskill and Kingston. Maybe opposite Saugerties. I don't remember exactly, but there must be an exit there."

"We must be headed west," Philip said. "What's up there, Georgie? Catskill Mountains, isn't it?"

"That's right. It's mostly State park in through here—if I've guessed anywhere near where we are. We seem to be climbing now. It figures."

"I can't think what these characters would be doing in a State park."

Michael had joined them. "We should probably reconsider our little scheme," he said. "We may be in these mountains for some time—overnight at least. I think we should play it by ear for a while. But if I use the code word—let's say 'hell's bells'—be ready for the rhubarb."

"What do you think they're up to, Allen?" Philip said.

"I have arrived at this conclusion," Michael answered

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somewhat pontifically. "I had not known before that those boxes contained wireless apparatus. It is now fairly clear that Niki is moving his headquarters again. The Woodstock area was obviously getting too warm; even the CIA boys had heard about it. Accordingly, he had first planned to move to Meriden, where he took us from New York. But the developments of the past day or two have indicated to him that our side is also aware of something going on in Meriden. He is now making a radical change in his base of operations. Niki is not stupid, you know. He's probably had a place in the Catskills lined up for weeks."

"You think we're just along for the ride? Will he keep us at the new place for a while—or is the boat trip still on?"

"Well, I can't be sure either way, of course—but I think we can expect to be put aboard ship within a very few days, unless we succeed in doing something about it. Undoubtedly Niki had ordered up this van primarily to move his wireless equipment. Perhaps only from Woodstock to Meriden. But when he decided to shift to the Catskills and at the same time had to move four bodies to the New York docks he simply did the obvious thing."

"Pretty big van to carry a few boxes," George said.

"Well, they're too bulky for the Cadillac," Philip said. "These boys haven't got an unlimited motor pool, and naturally they don't like to hire equipment. You see how useful a padded van can be to them, don't you? Unquestionably they own it."

When the truck stopped again Philip, whose watch dial was luminous, told them it was close to six-thirty. George knew that it would be quite dark outside in such weather.

"Is this it?" he said. "If they open up, should I try for the break?"

"Better hold it until we see what's going on," Philip told him. "Just keep your weight up on your toes. Be ready for anything."

The truck backed and turned two or three times, apparently having some difficulty getting in position. Then the engine

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was cut and George could hear only the wind and rain outside. A few seconds later he heard a heavy knocking on the doors. He moved his head close to the joint. Someone was shouting not far from his ear, but the words were hard to catch against the gale.

The banging came again, louder. "Look, you guys. Chow's on. Kick the door if you can hear me."

George was hungry. "What have we got to lose?"

"I guess so. I'll try to get through to him." George heard Philip's heel knocking against the wooden door.

"O.K., O.K. Now hear this. We're backed up to a cabin. When this truck door opens, a Tommy gun's going to be looking down your throats. You get that? Kick the door a couple more times if you got it straight."

"Roger. I've got it, sailor," Philip said softly. "Georgie, this boy's an old pro. The rhubarb is definitely off." He kicked the door.

The hoarse voice continued. "O.K. Then you go inside the cabin one at a time. The dame comes first. None of you other guys leaves the hold till she's inside the cabin. Then the next one; it don't matter who. Now you guys stay on course and nobody gets damaged."

As soon as one door was pulled open the wind seemed to pounce on them inside the van. A powerful beam of light from high above him caught George squarely in the eyes and he could see nothing at all. He heard chains clank and a man cursing in Hungarian as he tried to fasten something. Tisza slipped past him and disappeared up into the blinding glare. Then the driver shouted, "Next guy." He eased himself down over the tail gate. Immediately he was struck by an avalanche of water, pounded and drenched by it. Hardly able to keep his feet in the screaming gale, he stumbled up a long flight of steps, across a covered porch, and into a large, lighted room.

It was a cabin only in the sense that logs formed the walls. Apparently the room was the lobby of a resort hotel, furnished as a New York decorator might imagine a hunting

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lodge should look. A fire was burning on a field-stone hearth. A gallery, or balcony, ran along three walls overhead. The room itself did not hold George's eyes, however, because Niki Svidirov, with his loose-lipped Khrushchev grin, was leaning over the reception desk.

Philip and Michael came in, dripping on the Navajo rug like resurrected corpses of the drowned. The American driver, wearing oilskins and carrying his submachine gun, followed them—and the squat Hungarian who had first appeared at the Woodstock place with Svidirov. Tisza was not in sight, but George observed a wet trail leading to a corridor beyond the fireplace.

Svidirov banged a bell on the reception desk. "Front!" he said, and his grin widened.

In a moment Shura came out of the corridor and the younger Hungarian goon appeared at the dark dining-room entrance. Svidirov spoke briefly to the goon in his own language. Michael and Philip evidently understood; they moved toward the corridor, following the young goon, and George went along. As he passed Shura she glared at him.

Inside the corridor three doors stood open, and George noticed that the wet trail led to a fourth one, which was closed. Tisza, he assumed, was in that room. The goon said something to them, and Michael translated for George.

"These are our rooms. Imre says we can bring our wet clothes to the fire in the lobby after we change. He adds a warning that there will be an armed guard in the corridor."

George went to the door next to Tisza's and found himself in a small, comfortable bedroom with an adjoining bath. On the bed was a Hudson's Bay point blanket, white with candy stripes, and on the blanket lay a heavy terry-cloth beach robe. "The Hemlocks" was embroidered in green across the back of the white robe and, anomalously, a pine tree. He noticed a pair of wooden clogs under the bed. He looked immediately to the casement window above the bed. It was shuttered on the outside, and although the blinds were groaning and creaking in the storm, they looked uncompromisingly

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solid. He shrugged and decided to defer any bid for freedom. He assumed, however, that the others were still looking to him to make a break if the chance should come.

Letting his wet clothes fall to the floor, he went into the bathroom and had a hot shower. "The Hemlocks" even provided a wrapped tablet of soap and a huge rough towel. He regretted the lack of a razor; it was Wednesday evening, he recalled, and he had last shaved on Monday. Back in the bedroom he reached into the pockets of his trousers. He took out the knife and the wrench—his share of the radio tools—and put them under the mattress. He threw the hooded robe around his shoulders, pushed his feet into the clogs, and picked up the soaked bundle of his clothing. Then he remembered something. He reached under the mattress again for the knife, opened the blade, and dropped the weapon in the single pocket of his robe. He cautiously opened the door.

— Michael, Philip, and Tisza were already standing in the corridor, strangely monk-like in their white habits. Tisza had the hood raised to cover her damp hair, and her face was in heavy shadow. Imre, the young goon, was there too, with a large automatic in his hand. George joined them, and Imre motioned with his pistol. They trooped into the lobby.

Several dining-room chairs were arranged around the fireplace. No one else was in the lobby. Following Michael's example, George and the others hung their wet clothes on the chairs. Imre gestured toward the dining room, where a single chandelier was lit in one corner. They went in and sat down at a decently laid table. There was a small glass of colorless liquid at each place.

"*Framboise*," Michael said. "I'm sure it's all right. In Niki's book *alcool blanc* is essential to start off a proper dinner. That's probably an indication that we shall dine fairly well. He hasn't any vodka—at least none to spare for us—but they must have found this stuff in the bar." He tossed it off and ran his tongue over his lips. "Excellent," he said. "It's been twenty years since I've tasted *framboise*."

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George followed suit, and the dry, puckery warmth of the drink spread in his stomach. He felt much better. The squat goon—Tisza said that Niki had called him Sandor—came in from the kitchen and put before each of the them a plate of sardines and soda crackers. Imre appeared with four bottles of Utica Club and some glasses. The beer was not very cold, but George drank it eagerly. He wondered if dinner was over. It was not. The principal course was canned Danish ham with hard-boiled eggs—plenty of both. Hot tea was served in water tumblers. Then there were some rather stale cookies. The young goon tossed a pack of filter-tip cigarettes and a paper of matches on the table. George drew the smoke deep into his lungs. He could not help feeling almost benevolent toward Niki Svidirov.

Philip seemed to read his thoughts. "You don't owe them anything for this, Georgie," he said. "It's just the old build-up. They've conned some of our Presidents with this 'good old Joe' routine."

"*Angolul-tilos*," Sandor said.

"Sandor doesn't want us to talk English," Philip translated. "Just keep your bubble level, boy."

Eventually, Svidirov appeared in the doorway, giving them his sarcastic grin. He's going to ask us if we want to have coffee in the living room, George thought.

"Shall we have our coffee in the living room?" Svidirov said. But it was the last time he tried to play the clown.

When they filed into the lobby there was no coffee waiting. The only light came from the fire and from a single lamp on a table. The American driver and the two Hungarians were, standing in shadow near the outside entrance. Svidirov sat down in a leather armchair. There were no chairs near him for George and the others. They stood uncertainly in front of him in their long white robes like postulants before a fat abbot.

Svidirov looked at Michael for a long time. He was not smiling now. George saw his heavy cheek twitch. Then he

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spoke quietly to Michael at some length in Russian. Michael's lips whitened, but he said only "*Nyet.*" Svidirov's cold eyes fixed on each of them in turn. The fire highlighted his slightly Mongoloid features.

"So," he said. "We shall continue in English for the benefit of Mr.—Farrell. Although I have no doubt he is fluent enough in both Hungarian and Russian. To say nothing of Rumanian and other languages." He turned and stared at George.

"Did you kill Gyula Toth, my original chauffeur?"

"Sure," George said.

"Why?"

"He shot at me first."

"Very well. It is not important that he is dead. Only that it may be useful to place murder charges against you later."

"Where do you mean? Here in the States?"

"Never mind that. I ask the questions. Now—I wish to know precisely who are you? I think perhaps I was not correct that you are Nichols, who would be a somewhat older man. What is your true name?"

"You know that. It's George Farrell."

The Russian's eyes narrowed. "That is a lie. Do you deny that you are an enrolled agent of your Government?"

"I'm no agent of anybody's government. I'm a newspaperman. I live in Hanover, New Hampshire. If you had the brains of a bush-league flatfoot you could find that out—and then you could stop playing silly games."

"Easy, George," Philip said. "That doesn't do any good—yet."

In a moment Svidirov said smoothly, "It appears that you may be telling the truth." But his face was flushed. "Major Farrell is quite right that such outbursts do no good—ever. And no one in our profession would be so stupid as to indulge himself." He grinned shrewdly. "On the other hand, it is just possible that you are clever enough to utilize that very fact to deceive me. Congratulations, Mr.—Farrell. You have won the first round." He seemed almost affable again. "You

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understand, of course, that I need certain data for my preliminary report. Naturally, they must be precise and accurate data." He turned again to Michael.

"Now, Mihail Mihailovitch—at least you and I understand one another. We attended the same school in Moscow, did we not? Although at different times. So you will not hesitate to tell me who is your young colleague."

"Niki, you can believe me or not, as you please. I had never seen Mr. Farrell until you put him in the van with us today. To my best knowledge he is Major Farrell's brother, a newspaperman from Hanover, as he says."

Svidirov shrugged. "Very well. We shall leave this for the moment. But you can appreciate my position. When you and the major disappear—well, all of us in the business are expendable, are we not? Naturally your government will raise no awkward questions. But a civilian—" He looked at George with distaste.

The Russian got his massive body out of the chair and walked back and forth in front of them. "We are getting nowhere, gentlemen," he said. "Surely you know what must be the next step if you persist in denying me the co-operation which I need from you. But I wish to be entirely honest. I shall tell you what is in prospect for each of you under the best circumstances; that is, if you accept gratefully what the Soviet Union offers you. The Soviet Union is generous always, even to those who have been her enemies." George felt an urge to make a rude noise, but he suppressed the childish impulse.

"Miss Connelly-Hattyu," Svidirov went on, "will return to the Hungarian People's Republic. Although she has participated in counter-revolutionary activities, she has no reason now to fear for her liberty. The fascist-reactionary leaders have already been punished. She will find that her people's eyes have been opened. Together they face with joy a new life under socialism."

Looking at the others, George saw that Michael and Philip

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were completely impassive. Tisza stood tense, and her nostrils flared a little. Svidirov resumed his oration.

"Major Farrell, we come next to you. I am told that you have expressed a desire to visit the Soviet Union—perhaps to discuss your joint war plans with our General Staff. You will be given that opportunity. It is true, of course, that you did not make the offer sincerely, but when you are in Moscow and have become acquainted with our latest strategic estimate you will undoubtedly wish to reconsider the position of the West. We soldiers are realists, are we not? You will be treated correctly by our military people."

Philip muttered something—in Russian, to George's surprise—and Svidirov smiled grimly.

He turned to George. "Finally I come to read your future, Mr. Farrell. It is not too bad. You see, I believe you now that you are not in the business. You would be no good for it. You will remain here for a period of ten days to two weeks—until a ship carrying your friends has departed from Central America. You will be comfortable. Then one morning you will be discovered on the highway by the State Police. But do not alarm yourself unduly. You will be in good health. You have only to explain a few of your recent adventures—why you have been stealing a Cadillac car, why you abducted a diplomat of a friendly power, why you escaped the police before. Should you explain all that satisfactorily, you may have to tell why you killed a respectable Hungarian refugee named Gyula Toth."

"I can explain plenty of other things," George said.

"You think you will be believed? Really, it is too incredible." Svidirov's eyes showed a trace of amusement. "No, Mr. Farrell—if you will accept a suggestion, I recommend that you take the Fifth Amendment."

After a moment he went on. "Now there are only a few formalities to be completed. It is necessary for the record—for my own protection at home, you understand—to have signed statements from each of you acknowledging your participation in certain activities. These will not be used publicly

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unless, in the judgment of the Soviet authorities, it is essential to do so."

Svidirov turned to a table that stood behind his chair. He opened a drawer and removed several sheets of legal-size paper. He spread them on the table, took a fountain pen from his pocket, uncapped it, and put it down beside the paper.

"You have only to sign," he said.

George looked at the paper in astonishment. "Those sheets are completely blank," he said.

"Unfortunately, there has not yet been time to prepare your statements. This will be accomplished later. You may sign now, however. Then you may retire to your bedrooms undisturbed."

"Don't sign a damn thing," Philip said clamly. "It won't help us. But it will be worth plenty to them."

Svidirov's putty face went white. He shouted to the three men by the door and they moved over with pistols drawn. The American shoved the muzzle of his gun hard into George's side just below the ribs. The other two goons covered Michael and Philip. George's right hand went to the pocket of his robe, and he gripped the knife handle hard. Blood was pounding high in his chest and throat.

Svidirov walked slowly over to Tisza. With a surge of fury George remembered Stephen's prediction that she was to be used in the confession-getting technique. Suddenly the big Russian moved behind her and snatched away the beach robe from her. She stood covered by her satin nylon slip, her mouth open in horror.

In much less than two seconds George was lunging for Svidirov's throat. He held his knife commando fashion, like a bayonet, in front of him. The whole room roared, and something struck his shoulder heavily from behind. He felt himself spinning to the floor.

There was another crashing pistol shot. Then nothing . . .

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

GEORGE FOUGHT off the full return of consciousness; he was dimly aware that the severe pain in his head and his left shoulder would be even worse if he let himself come fully awake. He knew that he was in a bed, but not where the bed was—like the first perception of a monumental hangover. But eventually his brain was forced up against the inevitable question: What happened? He eased himself carefully into a sitting position, and pulsating pressure seemed working to force open the sutures of his skull. He could see gray light through the joints in the shutters over his bed. Gradually he realized that he was in a place called "The Hemlocks"—a prisoner—and continuity with the preceding night began to be re-established. He saw without much interest that his left arm was in a sling. Then a sense of panic came as he thought of Tisza. Where was she? Shot, like himself? Maybe killed? Nausea and overpowering weakness swept through him. He stumbled into the bathroom, knelt on the floor beside the toilet bowl, and was sick. The retching tore at muscles under the bandage. The blood in his temples was a throbbing stream of hot lead. But a reflex action made him reach up to turn the flushing lever on the toilet tank. The swirling water so close to his face dizzied him, and the noise of it filled the little room, but it kept him from passing out.

Later he heard a faint tapping, like a mouse at work. It seemed to come from the wall under the lavatory. He saw a small plywood panel secured by two turnbuttons was set into the plastered surface above the baseboard. Tisza's room, he remembered, adjoined his own on that side. He crawled toward the panel. After twisting the turnbuttons he found that he could pry it out with his fingernails. Inside the wall, between rough studs, was a drainpipe trap serving his lavatory and, apparently, Tisza's. There was another access panel on her side; he could see light around three edges of it. He

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reached in and pushed it gently. It yielded, and was immediately removed from the other side. The opening barely framed Tisza's face, partly blocked by the drainpipe.

"Are you all right, Gyorgy darling?" she whispered.

"I think so—if you are. If you are, I'm beginning to feel wonderful."

"With me it is nothing. Father is shot badly. But he lives, if a surgeon would come to him. Perhaps in any case, God willing. Philip is beaten only with fists."

"You're sure they didn't touch you, Tisza?"

"My Gyorgy—no." There were both tears and a smile in her voice. "Believe me, my dear, you have—stop the show."

"Tisza, should I make a break for help? If I can?"

"Yes, George, yes. If you can. It is all we have to hope, to call the number which Father have given. You remember? The police are not helping. Niki have reason. They are placing you in the jail. Therefore be careful, Gyorgy dear. You think it is possible? All doors are locked."

"I've got an idea I might get through the window. I'm going to try it right now. What time is it?"

"Six hours less the quarter. I think the sun will be coming now in some minutes. It is best that you go before this happens. But be most careful, Gyorgy, with the shoulder. It is quite a large hole through the trapezius, and on re-entry the bullet have cut the pectoral extension which form the axilla. The arm is now quite useless, except the fingers. The hemorrhage may start itself once more. And delirium is at all times quite possible from the loss of blood."

"You sound pretty professional. You bandaged me?"

"It was permitted. Also my father. Niki do not wish that we are dying here. It would be difficult for him with the bodies . . . Now go if you must." She thrust her hand through the opening, and he kissed it. "God go with you, my dear Gyorgy," she said.

The picture of the shutters was so clear in George's mind that he wondered why he had not seen the possibility before.

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They were the solid French farmhouse type, battened on what was now the inside. The vertical boards were bolted to the crosspieces, with the painted-over nuts projecting from the inside surface. Fortunately the casement windows swung inward. George found the wrench he had hidden under the mattress and went to work as quietly as he could.

The job was much simpler than he had expected. When he had run off the nuts securing one vertical board, he broke the paint seal and maneuvered the piece back into the room. The female elements of two lock-bolts were attached to it. There was now nothing to prevent his pushing both shutters open. But he had to lie down on the bed for a moment, forcing his will to override the weakness of his body.

His clothes were not in the room but his beach robe, blood-stained at the shoulder, was on the foot of the bed and his shoes were on the floor where he had dropped them last night. He put on the robe, slinging it like a cape over his left shoulder. He found he could use his left hand to help tie his shoelaces by bringing his foot up to meet it on the bedstead. He dropped the wrench in his pocket.

With some difficulty and considerable pain, he eased himself through the casement and sat poised on the sill. It was a good fifteen feet to the ground. He was doubtful whether he could lower himself with one arm, but there was nothing to do except try it. He got a grip and twisted his body to face the log wall, digging with his toes for support. Now he knew he should have remained barefooted. His shoes slipped off the smooth logs at once, and his full weight came on his hand. His fingers pulled open immediately and he fell and slipped and slid down the wall. The jolt of landing went up from his heels like a hammer blow when he struck the ground. His head began to ache blindingly, and he felt a warm ooze in his armpit. But he turned quickly and ran in an instinctive crouch for the closest trees.

He plunged deep into the wet coniferous cover before he dared to stop and look around him. The world he saw was still, preparing quietly for sunrise, as it had been ages ago—

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yesterday—when he stood on the abandoned railroad embankment and looked toward a shack on the river's edge. The sense of nightmare came on him again.

He trudged up the narrow, muddy trail for an indeterminate time, as in a dream or a drunken adventure. The trail began to zigzag across a mountain's face toward a distant ridge which he could occasionally glimpse through the trees. But long before the ridge line was within easy reach he was faced with a decision. A power line intersected the trail—tall double poles moving relentlessly across the mountains in a long, straight column. He knew that he had to find a telephone. That seemed connected with the power line in some way. He stared at the wide *allée* stretching into the distance, slashed across the mountainside as a path for the marching poles.

Then he turned and looked back toward the lodge. He could see it, like a rustic doll house. He observed, with no specific thought that it concerned him, the movements of three tiny figures outside the lodge. They were circling the buildings in a way that made George think of field-trial dogs trying to get down wind of birds in cover. While he watched, they seemed to get the scent, and he could see them moving toward the start of the trail on which he stood. Then the trees blotted them out. He realized now that he was the quarry. They were following him. The animal cunning he showed then, as he realized a little later, must have come from the depths of his subconscious mind, because he did not plan his next movements. He wanted to follow the power line, but that course smelt of danger. His tracks were clear in the mud behind him. He continued straight ahead on the trail, moving very gradually toward the right-hand edge, where needles of balsam fir carpeted the ground. He stepped off onto the brown carpet. It showed no imprint of his feet. He turned and raced back down the trail, keeping well off to the side on the bed of needles.

Soon he heard the hoarse, excited murmur of their voices below him on the trail. He wormed his way deep into the brush and lay very still. A certain lucidity had come back to

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him under the stimulus of fear. In a few moments three men appeared around a hairpin turn—the American truck driver and the two Hungarians. Their eyes were fixed on his footprints. He gripped the wrench in his beach-robe pocket, but he made no move—scarcely breathed. They filed on past him. When they were well out of sight he eased himself toward the trail and managed to pick his way across it without leaving a distinct impression in the mud churned up by the three men. Further on down the trail he came again to the point where the power line crossed it.

He swung to his right and followed the procession of the poles. It was slower and more painful, traveling through the wet hardwood slash. His bare ankles were gashed by the cut stubs of brush and whipped by the new shoots. Gradually he lost any sense of his mission and concentrated only on moving forward through a hot fog of pain. He had no thought for concealment now.

An hour or two hours later—time was meaningless, but the sun was well above the level of his eyes—the power line led him over a high crest. Far below him he saw a house and its outbuildings. A brown road stretched past it along the valley floor. The farm looked abandoned—a small shed lay on its side, the barn roof had caved in; the yard, where it was not under water, appeared to be littered with the debris of battle. There was no smoke from the chimney.

He left the power line and headed directly down hill toward the house. It was a long, hard march through witch hobble and hardwood brush. Most of the time his objective was out of sight, but almost instinctively he kept his face to the sun, as it had been when he first saw the farm below him. When at last the downward slope of the mountain began to level off, he knew he must be close to the house. But when it came in sight beyond a stand of alders, he found that his approach was blocked by a swollen torrent.

He hesitated only for a moment. Then he took off his shoes, slipped out of his robe, and made up a tight bundle to be held on his shoulder with his good arm. He stepped boldly

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into the brown, swift-flowing stream. The sharp cold of the water did not bother him particularly, but he found it very hard to stay upright against the current, and his bare feet wedged themselves painfully between rocks on the bottom. When he looked down at the rushing water he became so dizzy that he stumbled and went down to his knees. As the icy current struck him, two parallel lines of agony shot upward through his belly. He had not thrust out his arm to break his fall, however, and his bundle of clothing remained dry. With his eyes straight ahead he rose and plunged awkwardly toward the far bank. When he reached it he was numb and gasping. Naked as he was, he lay down to catch his breath. Immediately he lost consciousness . . .

When he opened his eyes he felt better and was in touch with reality again. He knew that he must have come all the way from the lodge—he had no idea how far—in a state close to delirium. Probably couldn't have made it otherwise, he thought. His fever alarmed him somewhat; it probably meant a degree of infection in his wound. But perhaps it was malarial in origin; a periodic fever sometimes came over him when his resistance had been lowered by other illness. Certainly he had lost a substantial amount of blood.

Looking around him, he saw that what he had taken to be the bank of the brook was actually a sort of island. The flood waters had made a shallow lake of this entire mountain meadow, except for the island which included most of the farmyard. The sun was fairly high now; George guessed the time at about ten o'clock. He put on his robe and shoes and moved toward the house. He felt normal, but very weak.

The storm had damaged the place considerably. Shingles littered the yard, a fallen television antenna lay half under water, a chimney had been toppled, and the doors and windows were blown in on one side of the house. The valley opened to the south, George noted, which made it a perfect funnel for hurricane winds. He supposed the family had learned by experience to abandon the place at the approach of a hurricane or even on a Weather Bureau advisory.

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He stepped into the kitchen through a doorless entrance. Yes, the house was regularly occupied. The first thing he saw was an old-fashioned cabinet telephone on the wall. Going to it, he turned the crank hard and got a satisfying ring. But that meant nothing, he knew, because the bell circuit on such antiquities was powered by self-contained dry cells. He put the receiver to his ear. Immediately he felt sick and empty. The dead silence of an open line was unmistakable. As he had more than half expected, the wires were down somewhere.

He went back to the door and looked hopefully down the road, thinking the family car or truck might be returning at any moment. The road to the south was under water in a number of places, he couldn't guess how deeply. A little desperately he tried to think of some way to orient himself. How far was the nearest village? In what direction? He knew generally which way the lodge was—not far from a northwest line established by the power poles—but he had no idea how far, nor where it fitted into the road net, nor indeed what the road net itself looked like. There wasn't much hope that a farmer would have a topographic map around the house, but occasionally an old county road map could be found tacked to a kitchen door, the home place smudged round with pencil marks. He'd have a look.

When George started to explore the kitchen he was reminded that he was hungry. There was no refrigerator, but he found some raisins and sweet chocolate in a cupboard and, unexpectedly, a partly filled carton of Pall Malls. He took a pack, and a handful of matches from the stove. He had a burning thirst but did not dare risk a drink from the kitchen pump. The well was probably contaminated.

Trying the doors, he found one that opened on a steep, narrow staircase. A lever-action deer rifle leaned in the corner of the inside jamb. On the first step was a dirty cardboard ammunition box. He picked out a cartridge—an obsolete low-velocity load, .32-20 Winchester.

Three of the four bedrooms were bare of furniture; the

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fourth contained only a bed, a chair, and a few clothes in a wardrobe. The evident poverty here was more than a little pathetic, and George felt guilty about having taken even the cigarettes. Now he wanted some of these clothes. He quieted his conscience by promising himself to make generous restitution if he ever got out of his mess. Certainly he needed something better than a bathrobe on him if he had to go into town to find a telephone. He put on a wool shirt. It was large enough to enclose the sling on his left arm. Then he tried a pair of overalls, but his shoulder would not bear the pain of the suspenders. Regretfully he picked out a pair of tan slacks which were evidently the man's Sunday best. He had to turn up the cuffs, but the waistband was snug enough to make a belt unnecessary.

On his way back to the kitchen he decided he would head south, down the valley. He could make better time, and he would be moving away from the lodge. No doubt the three goons were still searching the woods up there, but it would probably not be long before they took to the roads in the Cadillac. Time was pressing, too, because he knew Niki Svidirov would not keep his prisoners at the lodge indefinitely with George on the loose to contact the FBI.

At the foot of the stairs he hesitated, looking at the rifle. From long habit in the woods and in combat he felt he would get a certain companionship or comfort from it. But with his left arm almost useless, he could shoot it effectively only from the prone position. Furthermore, any passer-by might be less disposed to give him a ride if he were carrying a rifle. He thought of the three goons with their pistols, however, and of the position he would have been in if he had been unarmed the other night when the chauffeur, Gyula Toth, had opened fire on him. He yielded to his first impulse. He picked up the rifle, pressed a handful of cartridges into the magazine, and put the box of ammunition in his pocket.

Hating the idea, he knew there was one more thing he would take if he could find it. Money was scarce in this house, he was sure, and it seemed most unlikely that the owner had

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left any behind. Perhaps there was a desk or writing table of some sort in one of the other rooms. There might be a tin cash box in a drawer. He put down the rifle and moved from the kitchen toward the front of the house.

The small dining room was dusty and apparently seldom used; however, it was furnished quite completely. In a mirror over the ornately carved-oak sideboard, George glimpsed his own face with a sense of shock. His hair was wildly disordered and his beard past all decency. Coming closer he saw how bloodshot his eyes were. There were new lines around his eyes and his mouth, and a strange gauntness that scared him. He thought he knew why. He had the half insane look, the staring gaze, of a wanted fugitive in a police mug shot. He turned away from the mirror. When he opened a painted door and stepped into the sitting room he was not in a mood to accept calmly what he found there.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A DARK-HAIRED figure in faded overalls lay across the open front door. It was immediately clear that he was dead; a great blood clot had formed near his left temple and a stream of blood had dried as it dripped from the corner of his mouth. When George recovered from the initial shock he had to conclude that the big front door, hurled open literally with hurricane force, had caught the man on the side of his head as he was going to secure it.

George was profoundly moved by this lonely death as he had not been moved by death in combat, where it was always imminent. He tried to put a name to what he felt. It seemed to him that he was close to an undefined understanding, perhaps even to compassion. Yet while he felt the beginnings of a strange new sensibility to human suffering, he knew at the same time with a hot, sick feeling what he was going to do.

When his hand touched the man's wallet, he approached hysteria. He held his breath as if he were plunging his whole arm into a mass of smelling corruption, but it was not the hard, cold flesh under thin clothing that repelled him; it was a passionate disgust with himself. He laughed without mirth, frightened himself at the sound, and added up the series of his recent acts hardly distinguishable from crime. Any justification of his essential innocence was too difficult to put straight in his mind. The violence he had seen and done in a few days was more real to him than anything that had happened in all the years since the war's end.

There was a lot of money in the pocket-book—more than a hundred dollars in tens and fives and ones. The unexpected size of the sum was no joy to him; he tried to take comfort from that; for surely a ghoul would rejoice. He wadded the bills into his pocket, shoved the leather case under the corpse, and rushed back to the kitchen in something like panic.

His skin was dry as scorched paper. He knew the fever had

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him again and that he could not hold onto objectivity for very long. His tongue felt sticky against the roof of his mouth. Still he did not drink, but he pumped water into a dirty pan and splashed it on his face. It only intensified his thirst.

After a while he picked up the rifle and walked out into the late morning sunlight. He sank down on the porch, covering his eyes. Like a drunk at a certain early stage, he compiled a catalog of his responsibilities with exaggerated carefulness—the things he must, *must* do before he could allow himself to float off into the welcoming blackness. Telephone the number Michael had given him—by all means. Get doctor for Michael. Return money and rifle and clothes and a pack of Pall Malls to the dead man. There were other things, more remote. Do something for that kid and his girl in the shack, for Stephen in jail . . . He stood up and shook his head. It seemed to have cleared a little. The peak of the fever was periodic and it had passed.

There must be a motor vehicle of some kind in the barn, he reasoned, since the owner had not left the place. He walked over to look. Deep in the interior shadow he saw a car. It was a green Oldsmobile sedan, a 1950 model, an early 88. It was a notable performer in its day. He got behind the wheel, putting the rifle on the seat beside him, and turned the ignition key. His left foot, used to a clutch, bounced hard against the blank floorboard. He collected himself, shoved the Hydramatic control to neutral, and pressed the solenoid button. The wild, uncertain roar told him that the power plant had been radically modified—bored and stroked, certainly; with an extreme camshaft contour and gutted mufflers. He shifted to drive and trod on the accelerator pedal. The car leaped out of the barn, rear tires burning the board floor. Definitely a drag-strip job. George braked at the main road and considered his position.

He realized that he could not take this bomb into any town. Every teen-age boy and every cop in the county

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would know the car and the owner. In any case, water covered much of the road to the south. On an impulse he turned north, up the valley, away from where he had assumed the nearest village would be. Somewhere he would come to a telephone.

Now he began to notice with concern that there were no houses along this road, and he guessed that he was in or approaching the State park. The country was thickly wooded with balsam fir, like the country around the lodge. He was considering turning back when he saw a rustic sign, "The Hemlocks." He realized that he was in fact passing the main entrance to the lodge. He glimpsed a barricade across the entrance road and another sign, *Closed for the Season*. It was a matter of some relief to see that the van was still standing near the porch.

A half mile farther on the road ended abruptly. A cleared swath extended straight ahead. Apparently a continuation of the road was in prospect, but that did George no good at the moment. As he backed to turn around, he tried to evaluate his chances in a one-man raid on the lodge, considering the fact that he now had a gun. Very possibly there was only Niki himself left to keep Michael, Philip, and Tisza under surveillance. The other three men, of course, had been out looking for him. Well, he could not see too much future in the idea. Suppose he was lucky enough to kill Niki. Could they move Michael? No, the goons would still have the edge. They could bottle George and his friends up in the lodge indefinitely. He was loose now, and he'd better stay that way if he could. The risk involved in a raid, under the circumstances, was too great—not for himself, but for those who were depending on him. He had to find a telephone.

On the return trip he put a burst of speed past the lodge. They might have heard the car passing the first time—they could hardly miss the roar of the exhaust—and be waiting for it to come back. Any strange car up here on this dead-end road would arouse their suspicion. Accord-

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ingly he was not entirely surprised to see that the barrier had been removed and that the Cadillac was standing near the porch beside the van. Another chase, he thought wearily, and he was leading off with one arm and a crazy engine. But he pushed the pedal hard and did what he could to exploit any time advantage he might have.

Toward the end of the long straightaway he began to have a little hope. In spite of his relatively low top speed, the other car had not yet appeared behind him. It was possible that he was not being specifically pursued, that Svidirov, with or without a complement of goons, had merely been preparing for a routine continuation of the search for him. But they would certainly be coming out on this same road before very long. In a few minutes, when he was passing the dead man's farm and still had not sighted the Cadillac behind him, he felt much easier in his mind. He decided to drive on to the outskirts of the first village and then proceed on foot. What he should have done in the first place, he reflected.

Approaching a stretch of water in the road about a hundred yards beyond the farmhouse gate, he came to a stop. It looked passable, judging from the fence lines on either side of the road—probably not more than a foot deep. He shifted the Hydramatic control to low and moved slowly into the water. Everything went all right until he reached the middle of the mudhole. There the wheels spun on the soft bottom and the whole car sank a few inches. The engine stalled and quit. George heard water hissing on the hot mufflers. With an automatic transmission he had no way to pull ahead on the battery's power.

He looked behind him. As he had known it would do eventually, a black car had appeared up the valley in the distance. The watery meadow was flat and open on both sides of him, the nearest wooded cover too far to reach in time. He might make the farmhouse or, better, the barn. Grabbing the rifle, he splashed through the mudhole and went for it at a run, managing to keep the house in a line between

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himself and the Cadillac. When he pulled up, gasping, inside the barn, he was reasonably sure he had not been seen. But he knew the fever would soon be on him again. It was questionable whether he could climb to the loft. That was essential if the others stopped to search the place—the barn offered no good defensive positions on the ground floor, nor even decent concealment. And certainly the men in the Cadillac would stop to investigate when they saw the Oldsmobile stalled in the road.

Slats had been nailed across wall studs, forming a permanent ladder to the loft. He tried the ascent but found it impossible to keep hold of the rifle while climbing with one hand. He picked up a length of baling wire and hooked the rifle lever to one of his belt loops. With the piece banging against him, he managed to pull himself up the ladder.

The loft was almost full of baled hay and sacked feed, but a narrow corridor had been left open down the center. Although the ridge pole was broken and the roof caved in, as he had observed from the hill that morning, the hay bales had prevented collapse of the whole superstructure. George was peering through the hay door, looking toward the house, when the Cadillac drove up to the front entrance. He immediately leaped back into the gloom. He saw Svidirov and the American get out. They came around to the back, knocked on the casing, and waited a moment before going into the kitchen.

Maybe they'd just have a quick look around and then leave, George thought hopefully. They wouldn't like the idea of having a corpse on their hands any better than he had. There was nothing in there that would tie the place in with him. But suddenly he realized that there was. With an empty feeling above his diaphragm he remembered the bloodstained beach robe that he had left in the upstairs bedroom. He'd have to shoot it out, now. An immense depression engulfed him.

The hay door was partly open and it faced the house.

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George reckoned the distance to the back porch at about seventy-five yards. With some difficulty he dragged a bag of feed to the door and lay down behind it. The dust got in his nose and mouth, increasing the rage of his thirst. By holding the forestock of the rifle against his body with his left hand he found that he could work the lever—at some risk of blowing his head off. He rested the barrel on the feed bag and lined up the crude open sights on the back entrance to the house. If they came toward the barn, the sooner he could shoot the better—preferably beyond effective pistol range. He would have no chance in close combat. Knowing that the .32-20's trajectory curved like an infield fly, he hoped the rifle was sighted in for somewhere near the distance to the porch.

When the two men came out the door they had their pistols ready. As they faced the barn, George put his sights square on Svidirov's chest. He could see black buttons on the Russian's topcoat in the strong sunlight. He squeezed the trigger carefully. With the light report, the rifle twisted against his shoulder and jumped sharply. Immediately he threw the lever open for a second shot, but both men were running for the kitchen. George cursed the rifle, the sights, the ammunition, and himself. Must have shot way high, he thought. He'd have seen the mud spurt up on a low one. No doubt the rifle or the old cartridges, or both, were so erratic as to be useless.

Svidirov was calling to him from inside the house. The heavy voice was loud and clear: "Mr. Farrell—do you hear me?"

George lay quiet. His head was throbbing again, and too much effort was needed to fight off illusions which were leaping at him from the dark perimeter of consciousness. His mouth was so dry that his tongue scraped like paper inside his lips.

"I am sure you hear me," Svidirov said. "Mr. Farrell, you must know that this performance is futile. Your second brutal murder, your robbery of an innocent peasant—in

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this State you will not escape the electric chair . . . Do you hear what I say?"

Spongy as George's brain was feeling, Svidirov's words had a certain impact on it. He could see the complete impossibility of his position. With the dead farmer's money in his pocket, no bogeyman's tales of Russian secret agents would get much of a hearing when the police got hold of him. Wildly he resolved that his would have to be the classical end of the gangster gunman—at bay in his hide-out, surrounded by the police, snarling at the coppers to come in and get him. His cheeks were burning with fever, and he was beginning to identify himself with an imaginary criminal who was not George Farrell at all.

He heard a voice, as if from a greater distance than before. "You have an alternative to the electric chair. You have demonstrated certain possibilities. I will assist you to escape the police. I offer you what I have offered your brother. You will be treated well."

"An old gimmick," George muttered. "The chief yaks while the rest of the cops are sneaking up behind me."

Leaping to his feet, he dashed down the corridor between the hay bales and stared out the door at the other end of the loft. As he had expected, someone was moving across the corral toward the barn. George whipped the light rifle to his shoulder with his good hand and fired immediately, shotgun fashion, not bothering with the sights. The man pitched forward and lay still in the mud of the corral.

George worked the lever again and walked dizzily back to the hay door. He threw it wide open and stood in full view.

"All right, Chief," he screamed hoarsely. "I got another one of your boys."

The kitchen seemed to explode with sound at the instant a bullet *thunked* into the door near his head. He dived to the floor behind his feed bag. He heard an angry voice shouting.

"We shall see how you fare with your police, you fascist

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murderer!"

After a few seconds he saw the Cadillac backing fast out of the driveway. He fired once at it, without effect. As he watched, the big car swung south, slowly entered the mud-hole, and squeezed past the Oldsmobile. It accelerated at once on the firmer gravel and was gone. George closed his eyes, put his head on the feed bag, and allowed himself to slip once more into oblivion. . . .

His fever seemed to be following a definite malarial pattern. When he opened his eyes he was quite normal again, with an immediate grasp of what had happened. His first thought was a question: Was Svidirov actually going for the police? It seemed incredible that the Russian would risk any inquiry into his own position. As a material witness he might find himself on sticky ground. How about his diplomatic immunity? Well, it was hard to figure what a Russian would do. Anyway, Svidirov could always telephone an anonymous tip to the police. George decided that this farm was not a good place for him to be. He got to his feet and laboriously let himself down from the loft.

He had no feeling at all about going out in the corral and taking the dead goon's pistol from his hand. The bull-necked truck driver lay with his face buried in the odorous mud. He walked to the house and went into the kitchen. He pumped water from the sink and drank deeply. Nothing he had ever drunk had tasted so good. It was quite possible, he reflected, that he would not live long enough to die of typhoid. He had made up his mind what his next move would have to be.

First he ejected the remaining cartridges from the rifle, wiped it carefully, and put it back on the staircase with a box of ammunition beside it. He took the wad of bills from his pocket, went to the sitting room, and stuffed all the money in the dead man's wallet. The body had been turned over on its face, presumably by Svidirov or the American goon. There had been an obvious attempt to disguise the fact that the front door had caused the man's death.

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George replaced the wallet in a back pocket of the faded overalls. He walked upstairs to the bedroom, stripped off the clothes he wore, rolled down the cuffs, and hung the clothes up. He picked up his beach robe, which was still lying on the floor, and transferred the pistol to the pocket. He kept the cigarettes, lighting one as he arranged the clothing. That was the net extent of his larceny, he thought, together with three rounds of ammunition he had expended. But he intended to borrow the Oldsmobile again, if he could get it started.

The water had receded somewhat, and now the car stood well above it. Maybe the wiring had had a chance to dry out. When he pushed the button the engine caught with its insane clatter. He had a little trouble with slipping wheels, but he managed to rock the car into traction and backed noisily out of the mudhole. He backed all the way to the farmhouse gate, reversed his direction, and again headed north, up the valley.

Now he knew the lay of the land, and he pushed the green sedan flat out until he reckoned it might be within hearing at the lodge. Then he eased it past the entrance at low speed. When he got around the first turn, he drove off the road and stopped. There was no place to hide the car, but that did not appear to be important. No one was likely to drive past the lodge. He walked back toward "The Hemlocks."

He approached the building carefully, under cover of the balsam firs, and circled to the rear. When he passed the window where he had escaped that morning he saw that the shutters still hung open. That was about the best place to make a dash for the shelter of the walls, and he did it. He worked his way around the rear corner of the lodge, pistol ready. There was a stoop with three or four G.I. cans beside it—apparently the kitchen entrance. Now it was important to deduce whether anybody would be in the kitchen. He looked at the sun and estimated the time at well past noon. He didn't suppose lunch had been elab-

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orate. This seemed the best way in. He tiptoed up the steps and slipped quietly through the door.

The kitchen was deserted, with the peaceful look that clean, unoccupied kitchens have. Half a dozen empty beer bottles stood on a stainless steel table top. George moved to the swinging doors which led to the dining room. He listened for a moment but heard nothing. Very slowly he pushed one door and eased himself through the opening.

Like the kitchen, the dining room was very quiet. The shades were drawn. He edged along the wall to a pair of French doors opening on the lobby. Peering through the glass he could see four persons seated in a sort of rectangle in front of the fireplace.

The two goons, Imre and Sandor, had their backs to him. Each had a bottle of beer on a table beside him, and a handgun within easy reach. Facing them, about ten feet away, Tisza and Philip sat close to each other. They were wearing their own clothes, dry now, but wrinkled. Philip's face was battered rather badly.

George was able to open the right-hand door without a squeak. He was vulnerable while he did it; he had to tuck his pistol under his sling. He stepped softly into the lobby and leveled the weapon at Imre, the nearest goon. Tisza and Philip could not miss seeing him, but their eyes never flickered in his direction. They continued to look unhappy and a little sleepy. George considered the advisability of blasting Imre and then shooting it out with Sandor. Unfortunately, Tisza was dangerously close to his line of fire.

Suddenly, without moving his eyes, Philip spoke a few sharp words in Hungarian. Imre laughed shortly and replied with obvious sarcasm. But he did not reach for his gun. He said something to the squat goon, Sandor. Still not moving and without looking directly at him, Philip spoke to George.

"I've told Imre that you will surely kill him if he doesn't raise his hands and turn around very soon. If he does, I'll get his gun. But watch Sandor, too. He's very stupid."

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At the English words, the young goon lifted his hands uncertainly. He rose from his chair and faced George with the wary grin of a man who half expects a practical joke. But as soon as he saw the pistol pointed at him he spoke quickly to Sandor, who raised his hands immediately. Philip snatched up Imre's gun and Tisza took the other. He motioned the two men to the nearest wall.

"Why don't we just clobber them?" George said. "Then we'll put a bed for Michael in the van and drive it the hell out of here."

Philip shook his head. "Wouldn't stand up in court," he said. "We'll do it nice and legal. My firm's going to have enough trouble keeping you out of the pokey, as things are now."

"News for you," George said. "I knocked off another one an hour or so back—the van driver."

"Good God Almighty! Bloodthirsty little devil, aren't you? Did you see Niki?"

"I had a go at him too. Lined up my sights on him with a six o'clock hold. All I got was Maggie's drawers."

Philip whistled.

"Can I say nothing," Tisza said. "I wish to know how it is with you. You must be in bed, George dear. Philip and I, we shall entertain these gentlemen. It is simply to reverse the former position."

"How's Michael?" George said.

"I think he is better. But a surgeon should come soon."

"The telephone on the reception desk is O.K.," Philip said suddenly. "Niki used it this morning. Watch these guys, will you, George?" He picked up the instrument, and after some discussion the operator apparently connected him with a doctor's office. At one point, while Phillip was holding the line, George spoke to him.

"I think I know just the place for these boys. How about the van?"

Philip nodded, with a little smile. Tisza said something to the goons and they trooped sullenly out of the door

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ahead of her pistol. George checked the van. The radio boxes had been removed; there was no fear of another raid on the tools. He shepherded the goons inside and closed the doors. As he snapped the padlock in the hasp he noticed that there was no key in it. It seemed a very good joke on Imre and Sandor. When he heard himself laugh foolishly he knew his fever was returning again. Tisza looked at him with concern. They moved back into the lodge and George sank down in a chair.

"I could do with some of that beer," he said.

Tisza went toward the kitchen. When Philip hung up the receiver he came over and sat down beside George.

"You've done a real job, boy," he said. "I'm sorry I got you into this, but I don't know what we'd have done without you. I guess I wasn't far wrong in picking you for a contact man. You've played it like an old pro."

"Sure. Any time you want anybody cooled, let me know.

Philip was silent as Tisza came in with beer and some soda crackers.

"The food have exhausted itself. But the beer remains abundant. Now I must be going by my father. The surgeon comes?"

"He wasn't in his office. Pretty well occupied with hurricane business, I guess. But his nurse will get somebody out here—an ambulance, if she can."

Tisza nodded and moved toward the corridor.

"How about your call to New York?" George asked his brother.

"Look, George. When that ambulance gets here I want you and Tisza to go out with Allen. I'll meet you later at the hospital, wherever it is."

"What in hell are you talking about?"

"It's just that my job isn't finished."

George took a long drink of beer. "Niki?" he said.

Philip's battered face was inscrutable. "He'll be back here eventually. I hope the ambulance gets away before he comes."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

NIKI SVIDIROV returned to the lodge before the ambulance came, and Philip was waiting for him. It was Philip's voice that brought George out of uneasy sleep in his bedroom.

"Well, Niki," he heard his brother say, "now maybe we can wrap this up. Shall we take a walk together?"

George swung out of bed at once, threw on his robe, and went into the lobby. Svidirov was standing with his arms upraised, just inside the main entrance. Philip had him covered. The big Russian was wetting his lips; his eyes flickered around the room.

"Damn it, Phil, you can't do it."

"Do what, Georgie?" Philip said, not looking at him.

"Kill him in cold blood."

"I want to have a private talk with Niki; that's all. You don't know what you're talking about. Why don't you go back to bed? It'll save both of us a lot of explaining later."

"Phil, I won't stand for it. This is the United States, remember? You've got to try the son of a gun for something. You're making me an accessory to murder, and I won't have it."

His brother laughed shortly. "Listen to who's talking. What's your latest corpse count, chum? Who wanted to scratch two goons a little while ago?"

"There's a difference and you know it. Any time I get on the hook I'll get myself off—and my brother too—like anybody else. I'll kill if I have to. But we're in no sweat now. All I've got to do is pick up that telephone and we'll have cops swarming over the place in twenty minutes. And, by God, that's exactly what I'm going to do!"

"Georgie, listen to me for a minute. I was going to remind Niki of this story privately, but you might as well hear it too. And then ask yourself what an American court

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could do about it. . . . Take his gun, will you? Then we can make ourselves comfortable."

George came up with a Government Model .45. Above the trigger guard the receiver was stamped U. S. PROPERTY. He managed to pull the slide back to be sure a round was in the chamber.

"This one I can work," he muttered.

Philip told Svidirov to sit down, then took a chair himself. He lit a cigarette, offered one to George, and tossed the pack to the Russian.

"I owe you one from last night, Niki," he said. "When this is over I want us to be all even."

Philip looked thoughtful for a moment. "Well, two years ago, I was an Army attaché in Budapest. In spite of what everybody thinks, attachés aren't spies—ours aren't anyway. Maybe they buy information and know where to get it in other ways, but believe me, the State Department throws up its hands in righteous horror if an attaché tries to do any personal snooping and peeping. I'll tell you some day, Georgie, how I got kicked out of Hungary—and it won't just be the Commies you'll get a little irked at. But this is another story. This was before the revolution.

"Anyway, I had two servants in my villa on Harangvirag Street—a young couple. Lajos was the chauffeur and handyman. His wife, Margit, was cook and maid. She was a well-built little brunette from near Miskolc—real Hungarian doll. They'd only been married a few weeks when they came to work for me. Of course they had to make reports on me to the AVH. I knew that. In fact I coached them a little bit. But those AVH boys are hard to please sometimes, aren't they, Niki?"

Svidirov said nothing. He sat stiffly in his chair, his eyes searching the room. He looked ready to make a move, and George's hand tightened on the big .45.

"You see, George," Philip went on, "Niki was AVH top brass. Apparently he still is. On permanent loan, sort of, from the Soviets. I don't know exactly what his job was in

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Budapest. You could call him a commissar-instructor, I guess."

The Russian's jaw was twitching. He started to say something, but Philip overrode him.

"Well, to make a long story less gruesome than it really was, the AVH started working Lajos over. Not too rough at first. They gave him some wine with a mick in it and he was sick as a dog for a week. Then there's a little exercise they have using small leather bats loaded with sand. One day he came to me with the whole story. He was a scared Lajos. They wanted something from him that they could use to accuse me of arson among other things. I suggested that he and Margit quit and go back on the farm, but he said it was not permitted. Then I told him not to be a hero, to tell them anything he could think of. But I guess it wasn't good enough. Next time they had him in, they brought Margit along. Niki, here, was in charge. Then he turned loose two of his goons he had trained personally. It's a specialty of his. When Lajos told me about it he was sobbing so I could hardly make out what he was saying. By that time Margit was dead—and Lajos was glad she was."

Philip had spoken in a monotone, without emotion, but George saw his fists clench until the knuckles were white. His own throat was dry and aching.

"Many times I've thought of things I wanted to do to this—animal. But what I'm going to do is very simple. I'm not looking for personal satisfaction. I just want him dead. The world needs to have him dead. I'm going to put a bullet between Niki Svidirov's eyes."

"Not at the moment," Shura said.

Startled, George turned toward her voice but he did not see her immediately. Then the firelight was refracted from something long and metallic on the balcony. She was up there, partly hidden behind an upright beam, and she had the truck driver's submachine gun directed at them.

"She's not kidding," he told Philip. "She's got the chopper."

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"I ought to finish this slob anyway," Philip said slowly. "I'll never have another chance." But he let his pistol fall on the floor.

"You too, Mr. Farrell," Shura said. "Please drop your gun."

George did so. Svidirov scooped up both weapons and shouted a few Russian words at Shura. He was flushed and angry—the aftermath of mortal fear. When the woman came down the steps he took the submachine gun roughly from her.

"Get the girl," he said to her. "And the old man also. It is too much. I care not what is said in Moskva. Never so much indignity—and by such fools and bunglers. They play at cats and mice with me." His eyes were blazing, and George momentarily expected the burst of automatic fire. He knew he would not hear it finish. Tisza came out from the corridor, supporting Michael.

"Now," Svidirov said, "we shall see justice. Red Army justice. No political foolishness of promises and repatriation. In the Red Army we knew how to deal with such reactionary partisans. By the hundreds we gave them justice and buried them in one big grave."

"Graves are necessary in this instance," Shura said mildly. "The evidence of this thing should not remain behind us. We are not now in one of the People's Republics."

Svidirov glared at her. "That is understood. But tell me where are graves for these four fascists. Will you dig them—perhaps while I smoke a cigarette? They cannot dig their own—a woman, two cripples, only one able-bodied."

"There is the lake."

Svidirov pursed his lips thoughtfully. The first flare-up of rage had died and he was clearly beginning to consider consequences.

"And where are Sandor and Imre?" Svidirov asked Shura.

"I cannot say that. I was walking by the lake. Perhaps

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the Americans have disposed of them. But I heard no shooting."

"Where are they?" He turned on George, and his eyes were by no means friendly. George did not want relations to become any less cordial than they were.

"In the van," he said. "They're O.K."

Svidirov looked at Shura and motioned toward the door. She went out on the porch. In a moment she came back and spoke to him. He faced George again, and his jaw was working angrily.

"The key."

"Sorry—I haven't got it. Never did have it."

The Russian spoke violently to himself in his own language, but his wrath did not seem to focus on George this time. It appeared that another *Amerikanits*, no doubt the dead truck driver, was the knave.

"It is the lake, then," he said at last. "The van would have been better. The bodies could have been taken to the ship. But now it is the lake."

George realized then that they had never had a chance of reprieve. Svidirov had been concerned only with how he could cover the evidence. He had not wavered even momentarily in his decision to cut them all down in Red Army fashion.

"You will come in a single line to the border of the lake," he said, looking in turn at each of the four. "Except that Miss Connelly-Hattyu may assist her father. They will march last. Now you, the Brothers Farrell, remember this. You will die in any case. You know that. You will not wish it to be more difficult for your friends. Accordingly, you will make no foolish gestures. Should you do so, the others will have to look upon your bodies. It is better in these cases that all should go together. Is it not so?" Svidirov grinned wisely, as if they had all been involved in many such routine operations.

"I shall go out the door first. You will follow immediately."

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He backed through the entrance. George moved to start out after him.

There was the flat rasp of tires braking on the gravel outside, then the sound of running feet. Svidirov whirled on the porch, crouching over his Tommy gun. Two almost simultaneous explosions shook the windows. George saw Niki straighten up and immediately come apart. Rushing out on the porch he felt horror when he looked at what was left of the big Russian. The man had been blown almost in half at the waist. The dented metal of his weapon was curiously involved with his intestines.

Two competent-looking young men, almost like twins, were standing on the steps. They held riot guns, and identical wisps of blue smoke were rising from the two muzzles. A third man, older, was getting out of the car with a revolver in his hand. Slightly in the background was Stephen Szabo-Lewis.

"Greetings, old boy," he said. "Everyone faring well, I trust. You could do with a shave."

The others were on the porch now. Philip laughed. His relief was obvious. "The U.S. Cavalry," he said. "But they look more like FBI types to me. How in hell did you guys get here?"

"Shura," George said suddenly. "Let's not forget *that* dame again." He turned and moved quickly into the lodge. She was sitting in a chair by the fire.

"You are a very fortunate son of a dog, Mr. Farrell," she said calmly.

Philip and the senior FBI man were sitting near a window talking earnestly. Another agent was on the telephone. Stephen was chattering in Hungarian to Tisza and Michael. There was sporadic activity with a camera and other equipment out on the porch.

George felt at loose ends with nobody to talk to. Then, abruptly, it occurred to him that for the first time in three days he was free of the pressure to do things that always seemed a little beyond his power. His chin dropped on his chest. In a moment he was asleep. . . .

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While he was sleeping, the ambulance came for Michael, and Tisza went with him when it left. As George learned later, it had been decided to take Michael into New York City, to Mount Sinai. When the senior FBI man woke him, George was still very tired.

"You'd better go home and get a good night's rest, Farrell," the agent told him. "And you'll need some decent clothes, of course. Stephen Szabo-Lewis has offered to drive you to Hanover."

"Sounds good to me," George said.

"You know there are some charges against you in Vermont, so try not to get involved with the State Police while you're passing through. There'll also be homicide investigations later, here and in New Hampshire." He smiled. "You're going to spend quite a bit of your time next week talking to prosecuting attorneys. But don't worry about it. Just a formality. We'll lay the ground work—and our legal staff will take care of you. Oh—and your brother's people want to see you in Washington Saturday morning, if you can make it."

"What day is today? I've sort of lost track."

"I don't wonder. It's Thursday."

"Well, maybe, if I can get enough sleep by Saturday morning."

George slept all the way home. He wanted to hear Stephen's story, but he felt himself drifting off long before the Lancia reached the Thruway. It was about four hours later, in his own farmhouse, after they had shaved, showered, and were having a drink before dinner, that he heard the first part of the tale. It was continued over fried chicken, ice cream, and coffee, interrupted while George went down to Mary Hitchcock Hospital to have his shoulder dressed, and finished between bourbon nightcaps.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHEN George had dived over the guard rail the day before in order to get away from the Vermont troopers, Stephen was only momentarily surprised. He realized at once what George's object was and thoroughly approved of his method. As for himself, he could see no future as a refugee from the Vermont law—unfamiliar with the country and with no transportation. He did not even know precisely where Svidirov's Woodstock headquarters was. There was in fact little prospect of escape after George departed. Stephen found himself hand-cuffed, first to a steering wheel and later to a large and effective-looking trooper. The next few hours he spent quite comfortably in the Windsor jail.

His cell mate was the Hungarian who had driven the Lancia during the night chase toward Woodstock. Peter was really quite a decent chap for a Communist, according to Stephen. A little stupid, but not vicious; a bloody good driver, too, and he had praised the Lancia highly for its handling qualities. Stephen was rather glad that he and George had not succeeded in forcing Peter into a ditch at a hundred miles an hour. He was able to reach a gentleman's agreement with Peter, who was very much impressed by the honor of occupying the same cell as a member of the illustrious family Szabo-Lewis. In return for a promise of future remuneration—and of course a Szabo-Lewis, unlike the Communists, could be depended on—Peter readily agreed to share the guilt with the absent George for planning the kidnaping of Svidirov and stealing the Cadillac.

When they appeared for arraignment at nine o'clock that morning, Peter told his lies like the little Party stooge he was. Even so, Stephen undoubtedly would have been in difficulty except for the fact that Svidirov had declined to witness any charges on the grounds that he did not wish to waive his diplomatic status. The Russian did

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not even appear in court. The only firm accusation the State of Vermont could make against Stephen was that he had been carrying a concealed firearm, and since he stated positively that the American criminal George Farrell had planted the weapon on him after their capture, that charge was dismissed—although the pistol was confiscated as possible evidence against George.

Stephen had all the legal papers to prove his ownership of the Lancia, plus Peter's testimony, and it was returned to him. By ten o'clock he was a free man, subject only to an admonition not to leave the State until further notice.

The first thing he did was to break his parole by driving back to George's farmhouse across the river in New Hampshire. He wanted to study the maps which George had left on his desk. The pencil mark around the Woodstock place gave him the information he needed.

About noon he was in Woodstock, approaching the service station where George had talked to the old man an hour earlier, when he saw the familiar black Cadillac coming down the hill. Should he go ahead and scout the headquarters, or should he tail the Cadillac? It depended on who was in the car. He pulled into the service station to get a look at the passengers if he could.

This time he spotted Svidirov easily in the back seat and a woman on the other side whom he could not see distinctly. He assumed, of course, that it was Tisza—and immediately decided to follow. What had happened to George concerned him, but there was nothing useful he could do about it.

Although he did not know the road net, he was able to keep on the Cadillac's trail—U.S. 4—through Rutland and as far as Mechanicsville, New York. But the storm was coming up; when the rain started, visibility was sharply reduced. Eventually he found himself in Troy, with an uneasy feeling that Svidirov was probably in Albany, on the other side of the Hudson River. He decided the time had come to call for help.

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From a pay station in Troy he called his contact in New York City, an agent named Atwater whom he had been working with in the refugee-screening operation. It took twenty minutes and a pocketful of quarters to sketch an outline of the situation and to answer certain questions. He gathered from Atwater's tone that the sort of thing he and George had been engaged in was not encouraged by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. But the man was far from being a stuffed shirt. He had been thinking while he listened.

"All right, Stephen," he said. "It's almost a sure thing that they're heading for New York on the Thruway. We'll pass the word to the Thruway patrol, and we might pick them up within a few minutes. But there's one complication: The Weather Bureau has an advisory out that puts the Thruway square in the path of a hurricane. It's due in Albany within an hour and it's blowing like hell down here at the Battery right now. If Niki's listening to his car radio, he might decide at any minute to hole up for the night. You say he did that in Bennington on Monday—seems to like his comfort. I'm taking a car and a couple of the boys and starting north on the Thruway right now. You start south. We'll meet at—wait till I find a map—we'll meet at Kingston. Got that? Main post office in Kingston—postmaster's office."

"Quite," Stephen said. "Kingston it is. Cheer-o."

"Wait a minute. I want you to check every exit gate from Albany to Kingston, inclusive. Traffic will be light. The guards will probably remember that Cadillac if it leaves the Thruway. Now if you get a lead, keep on it—but leave word for me at Kingston. Telephone the postmaster. Let me know where to meet you. O.K.?"

"I have it," Stephen said, and hung up.

It was raining fairly hard, with gusts up to about fifty miles an hour, when Stephen stopped at the Catskill exit. Only one gate was in use. The guard recalled that a black Cadillac with New Hampshire plates had checked through

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less than half an hour before, but he was not sure which way it turned after leaving the Thruway. He thought it went west. Stephen paid his toll and guessed at the most likely route. It seemed to be 23A.

At Palenville he inquired about accommodations, which were limited, and cruised around in the hard-driven rain to examine those which had been mentioned, hoping to see the Cadillac parked outside. There was only one lead he did not follow up.

"They might put you up at 'The Hemlocks'," a waitress had told him while he drank a cup of coffee. "It was closed for the season, but some new folks have rented it, and I heard just a few minutes ago that they went up there this afternoon. Reopening the place, I guess. Kind of a wet day for an opening, huh?"

He rejected that as a lead. Svidirov would be unlikely to know about "The Hemlocks". It was too far, anyway. Stephen felt that the odds were getting too heavy against him. He called Kingston and arranged for the Government men to meet him at the Catskill exit. By the time they arrived the storm was going strong, and there was nothing to do but take cover in a Catskill hotel. They passed the time making a telephone survey of motel registers, checking up on New Hampshire licenses. No dice.

Early next morning they were out combing the service stations, tourist homes, and the motels without telephones which they had been unable to contact.

"We'll have to do our own routine police work for a while," Atwater had told Stephen. "The local people have their hands full this morning. It wasn't a bad one as hurricanes go, but there's a certain amount of damage—accidents and so forth. One thing we wanted very badly was a helicopter. Unfortunately, they're all tied up on rescue work down state, where it was much worse. But at least we know Niki can't put a wheel on the Thruway without getting picked up."

By noon, however, the possibilities seemed to Stephen

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to be getting pretty thin. The weather was fine, and there seemed to be no reason why Svidirov should not have resumed his journey to New York. Not only the toll road but all other through routes were being watched. But the unpleasant suspicion was arising that the Cadillac had not left the Thruway in the first place; that the guard at the Catskill exit had been mistaken. The distinctly unpalatable idea had also occurred to Stephen—and Atwater glumly agreed that it was possible—that Niki's car was equipped with an FM receiver to monitor the State Police frequencies. Thus the first radio alert might have given him a chance to sneak off the Thruway and make a dash for New York or elsewhere on the back roads.

Atwater had split his party into two groups, and Stephen was driving his own car. He and one of the junior agents found themselves in Palenville as the noon whistle cleared its hoarse throat on top of the fire station. They stopped in for a sandwich at the diner where Stephen had had coffee the afternoon before.

"Lot nicer weather today," the waitress said. "Did you find a place to stay last night?"

Stephen smiled and nodded. "Good of you to ask," he said.

"Not 'The Hemlocks'?"

"Not 'The Hemlocks.' You made it sound a bit uncertain, you know. Just opening, and all that."

The agent was mildly interested. He looked at the waitress. "Did you recommend 'The Hemlocks' to anybody else yesterday?"

"No—why?"

"Oh—I thought it might be what I'm looking for, if there aren't a whole lot of people going up there. I need a quiet place for a few days where I can finish a TV script—place where nobody would bother me."

The girl was immediately fascinated. "Gee, that's interesting. I'd like to see that show. What's the name of it? . . . Well, like I was telling your friend yesterday, 'The Hem-

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locks' was always a very nice place. These new people are Russians, but they wouldn't be Communists, would they? Not here, anyhow! Anyway, my boss had them pointed out to him when they were here a couple of weeks ago to sign the lease in the lawyer's office across the street, and yesterday afternoon—we were having that storm, you remember?—my boss was looking out the window—business was slow—and he said "There's those people who rented "The Hemlocks," ' he said, 'going past in their car. I remember the guy,' he said. 'I bet they're going to open the place up,' he said. Well, I guess he was right, because a big moving van came through a couple of hours later—just after your friend here left—smack in the middle of the storm—and there wouldn't be any place else west of here where anybody's moving—"

"These new folks—they seem like pretty solid people, do they? Drive a nice car?" The agent was casual but interested.

"Gee, I wouldn't know that. I didn't see it myself."

"Well, thanks. I think maybe I will take a look at 'The Hemlocks.' Where did you say it is?"

She told him, and hurried off to wait on a pair of garage men in blue coveralls.

"This figures," the agent told Stephen when they were out in the car. "Say that Niki wasn't headed for New York at all. Maybe shifting his base of operations to the Catskills. Perfect spot for him during the off season."

"I suppose I missed the bus on that one back in Woodstock. I should have made a quick canvass of the old place."

"No; you'd have lost the Cadillac. The more I think about it the more it figures. We've got a meet with the boss in less than an hour. I'm going to talk to him. I'll bet he says we move into 'The Hemlocks,' and when we do, we move in loaded."

And that was precisely what they did.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Saturday morning Philip met George at the National Airport and they had coffee, and got into Philip's sedan.

"When we get there, I'll take you in to see Uncle Bill for a minute," Philip said. "Then they'll want to get your story on tape. That'll take most of the morning, probably. We'll run out to the house for lunch—Ann's expecting you. Stay with us as long as you like, of course—Ann says for the week end, at least."

Hearing Ann's name, George recalled his tense exchanges with her over the telephone. "Speaking of Ann, what was the idea of telling her—back at the beginning of this thing—that you were going on to Paris?"

"Nothing much to that business about my flying to Paris," he told George. "Routine cover operation. Somebody here might have missed me and started asking questions. Just to make it look good we even put a guy aboard the midnight flight with a ticket and passport in my name."

"What was the object of the whole exercise, anyway?" George said. "I never did get it entirely straight why you wanted to see me in New York in the first place—and what went wrong."

"The operation was Allen's idea. He had it figured about right, too—except that we didn't know Niki Svidirov was in this country. Somebody goofed there, because Niki was Mr. AVH. You see, Allen had been working on this AVH thing for two years, and he wanted to crack their apparatus here in the States once and for all. It was never intended for me to try to penetrate the Soviet set-up; that was just the come-on. My job was to pinpoint the main AVH hide-out. We knew it was somewhere within a few miles of Dartmouth.

"Well, Allen dreamed up this tale about an American General Staff officer wanting to defect to the Russians and let it drop among his AVH friends. He knew exactly what

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would happen; they ran to the Soviet Embassy with it. But of course the Moskoffs weren't buying much of that. It was too crude—but deliberately so. Yet they couldn't believe the firm could be so stupid, and they didn't want to pass up something good. They told the Hungarians to check it out. We knew we had our break when Colonel Thompson, at Dartmouth, picked up something an anti-Communist refugee student had overheard. It confirmed precisely what Allen had foreseen. So we laid it on. When I had the AVH layout specked cold—something that would stand up in court—I was going to call in the FBI and close up the show. That's where you were supposed to come in."

"What do you mean, exactly?" George said. "I'm no dagger boy. What did you expect me to do?"

"Just about what you and Stephen actually did—tail me to the hide-out area, contact me secretly, and unleash the G-men when I told you the time was right. You see, we couldn't risk having a strange agent wandering around that country. It had to be somebody who knew the terrain and the people, who wouldn't stir up any talk when he wandered through the woods. I knew you hunted a lot—fortunately it was open season—and you'd had commando experience. Best of all, you're a newspaper man; everybody expects you to go around sticking your nose in other people's business. You were a natural. But I never got a chance to brief you—or even let you know where and when the AVH boys were going to meet me."

"You told me that part—Niki met you at the airport and crossed you up."

"That's right. Reminds me, I've got to check out that Hungarian switchboard girl at Allen's apartment building. How the hell did Niki know we'd be on that plane?"

"Didn't Niki recognize you at Idlewild?"

"I don't think so. I didn't know him by sight, as a matter of fact. Knew his reputation, of course. But it was quite a while before Allen got it across to me that our future was very dim."

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The sedan had pulled up on Constitution Avenue, before a white marble building surrounded by a park-like lawn. Philip cut the ignition and looked at his brother.

"Uncle Bill's a house guest here," Phillip said, grinning a little. "If you had a meet with him next week, you'd probably be taken somewhere across the Potomac, or maybe out in Maryland. Uncle Bill doesn't stay put."

They walked through the Saturday quiet of the empty lobby, their footsteps echoing on the marble floor. Philip ignored the one elevator which was operating in the double bank and went on to the rear of the building. He opened an ordinary-looking door with a key from his pocket and they stepped inside a pushbutton lift. In a few moments they were in a large private office equipped with the standard assistant-secretary-level Government furnishings. There was nothing in the room to reflect the personality, career, or private life of whoever worked there. George and Phillip stood in front of the vacant desk. After about ten seconds a side door opened and a man came in quietly. He was tall, brown-faced, and gray-haired. He looked healthy and in excellent condition. Like a country gentleman stranded in town over the week end, he wore a homespun jacket and non-matching slacks.

"Uncle Bill, this is my brother George," Philip said.

Uncle Bill was cordial, but not effusive. His voice was free from any regional peculiarities. "I wonder if you'd find it convenient to spend a few minutes with me this afternoon," he said to George, after the basic amenities had been exchanged. "Say at three o'clock. After you've put your story on tape and I've had a chance to run through it two or three times, I'd appreciate talking to you."

George agreed, and he spent the next few hours in the recording room. As a newspaper man he found it easy to handle the straight narrative of his participation in the affair. But he was not allowed to let it rest there. When he finished, with a brief statement concerning the manner of

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Niki Svidirov's death, the pleasant young man who was monitoring the recorder turned to him.

"That was very clearly put, Mr. Farrell. A good objective story. It will help us a lot, and it should satisfy some of the public prosecutors in your part of the country. Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to ask you a few questions. This will go on the tape too, with your permission, but it won't be released outside the firm. Sort of a cross-examination, to round out the picture for Uncle Bill."

However, many of the questions the young man asked would not be permitted in any court George had ever visited—not without vigorous objection from opposing counsel. The points covered were those a psychologist might be interested in: how George felt at a given moment, what his mental reaction was to a certain situation, how he planned to meet a possible contingency. He answered as well as he could, trying to be honest and admit fear or bewilderment when that was what he recalled. Emotion seemed to have no hold on him as he reviewed the incidents of the past four days. He was puzzled, nevertheless, as to how the subjective treatment of this material would assist the firm.

When he had finished, Philip joined him and they drove out to Chevy Chase for lunch with Ann and Junior.

Promptly at three o'clock Philip took him again to Uncle Bill's office. George wanted to get back to New York that evening—he had thought of looking up Patsy Dolan—and his brother had offered to drive him to the airport immediately after the interview. As soon as Philip had left the office Uncle Bill looked at George with friendly directness.

"I found your story most interesting, Mr. Farrell. Even though I'd heard Philip's side of it, there were several points that weren't clear in my mind until I listened to your very well-organized account. Now I wonder if you'd mind my asking you two or three additional questions about yourself. You needn't answer them, of course, if you don't want to."

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George was becoming a little irritated, but he tried not to show it. "Well, I don't understand why I'm being psychoanalyzed, but if it will help you people—and maybe keep me out of jail—go ahead."

"Thanks.. The questions are motivated, as the professors would say. . . . You edit a newspaper in Hanover, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Like the job?"

"Why, yes—I'm pretty well satisfied with it."

A pause and a more personal note in Uncle Bill's voice seemed to change the subject. "How do you feel now about your future?"

George flushed. "What do you mean?"

"Your job's the end of the road for you, isn't it? You're pretty young. Wouldn't you like to work on a New York paper, for instance?"

This was a question George had sometimes asked himself, and he was not sure he knew the answer. Now, when he found himself facing the question for the first time from an outside source, he was interested in his own reaction.

"Well, as a matter of fact I don't think I would. I might have, at one time. But I'm beginning to think I'm not a newspaperman at all. It's not really important to me. You see, I went with the *Crier* right out of college because I wasn't ready to leave home. Dartmouth and Hanover were home to me, after the war. As a kid in the Army I'd never actually had a home since my mother died—I was eight years old then. Well, lately I'm getting pretty tired of the *Crier*. It's just a bush-league *Washington Post*, complete with Herblock—'hurray for socialism but for Pete's sake don't call it that!' That's all right for sophomores, I guess. But at my age, and in times like these, I feel that I ought to be more deeply involved in something I believe in—*engaged*, if you know what I mean."

The brown-faced man across the desk nodded. He looked interested. George felt as if he had known Uncle Bill for a

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long time. Strangely, he wanted to go on talking. He was curious to hear what he was going to say next.

"You know, sir, I'd like to edit the *Crier*, all right, but later. I want that job when I'm about fifty years old, after I've actually done something. It would be fun to go back to Hanover in twenty years, but I'm not terribly keen about going back now." George shook his head apologetically. "Sorry. I didn't mean to make a speech. I was thinking out loud, as they say. And I haven't really answered your question."

Uncle Bill grinned at him. "Maybe you have. How do you like my technique? The idea is to listen and let the other man do all the talking. It doesn't always work, though. . . . The next question's simpler. Are you married?"

"No."

"Anybody in mind?"

"No."

"Well, that's about it. I suppose you've known from the beginning what I've been driving at."

"Can't say I have."

"I'm offering you a job with the firm."

George blew out his breath. He lit a cigarette to gain time.

"I don't know that I'm qualified," he said. "Niki Svidirov—I gather that Niki was something of an authority—he told me I'd never be any good at it."

"You're alive and Niki's dead."

"I didn't have much to do with that. But it reminds me; I'd have to know one thing."

"What?"

"I've got an idea you'll pass this one, sir. That's up to you. . . . My impression is that Niki Svidirov's number was up; that the play was to rub him. I realize that he had it coming, but—"

"You were in combat, Mr. Farrell. Did you ever kill a man?"

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George nodded. "I've thought of it from that angle. It just doesn't—"

"In war we're ready to kill any poor devil who wears the wrong color suit. He may be a good husband and father, kind to his mother, asks nothing from life but a few pals and a bottle of beer on a hot night. But we don't give him an even break if we can help it. And we plan to make it worse next time—megaton bombs and ICBM's that kill blindly, without regarding age or sex. Sure, it's a necessity of survival. But be honest with yourself, Mr. Farrell. The next war is already being fought. You know that. If you didn't, I should have thought your eyes had been opened recently." Uncle Bill's smile was wintry. "Today, of course, the clean, respectable thing is to be a scientist and devote your life to stepping up the potential of mass death. Well, that's fine. But push-button techniques are no good in the war my boys are fighting. Somebody has to get his hands dirty. I will tell you this much, in answer to your question. On our side, at least, we do have certain rules. There is no open season on the innocent. The only persons who ever have been or ever will be proscribed are professional agents of hostile powers. These are our enemies. It is not a matter for the newspapers, but. . ."

Uncle Bill did not finish the sentence. "Now I have made my speech," he said. "But I want to add a bit more. You question your qualifications. We all do that. But given the moral and physical strength, together with normal intelligence, the rest is training and experience. Languages and all the rest—there are intensive teaching methods—at Monterey, for instance—that give a man his initial technical equipment in a matter of months. And one more thing I want to say. To my deep regret, Philip is leaving us. The Army wants him back. It seems they all have to learn to be scientists—'dedicated men,' I believe they're usually called. Philip is young, but he was one of the most promising boys we've ever had. We'd like very much to continue having a Farrell in the firm. And that's about all I have to say."

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Now there seemed to be nothing George could do to delay his answer. Somehow it would be off key to say he'd let Uncle Bill know later. He looked at the lined brown face, the searching, compassionate eyes, and the steady mouth. He felt a withdrawal in the man, as if Uncle Bill were deliberately sealing off any emanation of himself which could influence George's judgment. It was almost as if he hoped for George's sake to hear a refusal. Uncle Bill had done his professional duty, it seemed, and as a human being he would almost wish to undo it. George knew again that his decision could not be deferred. This was the moment for it.

"All right, Uncle Bill," he said.